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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ONE MAID'S MISCHIEF ***

George Manville Fenn

"One Maid's Mischief"

Volume One—Chapter One.

One of her Victims.

Seven o'clock in the morning, and *chee-op—chee-op—chee-op—chirrup—pee-yew*—a splendid thrush waking the echoes with his loud notes; the blackbirds down in the copse whistling a soft love-song to their silent mates, waiting in their cup-like nests for the first chip of the blotched eggs; Coelebs, the chaffinch, pouring down tinkling strains from the pink-blossomed apple-trees; while the larks high above the young corn and clover, twittered their joyous hymn in rivalling accord to the May-morning sun. The dew lay heavy and cold upon the tawny, sweet-scented wallflowers, and the freshness of feeling in the shade whispered that the silvery whiteness of their hues was not far removed from frost.

So thought the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, as he stood contemplating the flower-beds in front of the quaint old Rectory, whose windows were framed in the opening blossoms of a huge snaky-stemmed wistaria, one of which windows—his own—was wide open, and had been for an hour, while its fellow over the little drawing-room was delicately draped in snowy dimity.

Geraniums formed the subject of the Reverend Arthur's contemplation as he stood upon the closely-shaven, dewy lawn; and he had just come to the conclusion that he had better wait another week before filling his beds with the scarlet trusses, when there was the sharp sound of brass rings upon a rod. The dimity curtains were drawn aside, the casement window was opened and carefully hooked back, and the kit-cat living portrait of a pleasant plump little woman of about forty appeared in the frame.

"Arthur, I'm sure you are getting your feet wet," she chirped.

The tall, very thin curate of Little Magnus looked dreamily up at the window, and then down at his feet, stooping a good deal to obtain a nearer view. Slowly rising, he looked up at the window again, took off his soft felt hat, smoothed his thin grey hair, and said slowly:

"No, my dear, I think not."

"But I'm sure you must be, Arthur; it's a very heavy dew?" cried the little lady, emphatically.

"Yes, my dear Mary," he replied, in a slow, deprecating way, "it is a very heavy dew, but I have got on my goloshes."

"Ho!" exclaimed the little lady, and she disappeared.

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury began to make a peculiar humming noise, somewhat suggestive of a large bumble-bee trying to practise a chant, which was his idea of singing, and was walking slowly off towards a laurel-shaded walk when the little lady once more appeared at the window.

"Arthur!"

"Yes, my dear Mary?"

"Don't you go far away; breakfast won't be long."

"No, my dear Mary."

"Where shall you be?"

“Down by the bees.”

“You’ll come when I whistle?”

“Yes, my dear Mary.”

The lady disappeared once more, and the curate of Little Magnus went slowly and deliberately down the garden of the Rectory, where he had been for many years resident; the wealthy rector, who was a canon of Dunchester, finding a sermon or two a year nearly all he could give to the little parish.

The bees were visited, both those dwelling in the round-topped, old-fashioned straw hives and the occupants of the modern square boxes, cunningly contrived to enable the proprietor to commit honied burglaries without adding bee-murder to the offence.

The bees were as busy as those immortalised by Dr Watts, and coming and going in the bright sunshine, making a glorious hum in a snowy cherry-tree close at hand, and suggesting to the curate’s mind ample supplies of the cloying sweet, about five hundredweights of which he hoped to sell at a shilling a pound.

The Reverend Arthur went slowly away, smiling in his heart—he rarely smiled visibly—happy and thankful for his lot; opened the white gate in the tall green hedge, and after closing it carefully, began to walk across the drenched grass, a couple of soft-eyed, mousy-skinned Alderney cows slowly raising their heads to stare at him, munching the grass the while, and then coming to meet him, lowing softly.

“Ah, Dewnose! Ah, Bessy,” he said, pulling the great flapping ears of each in turn, and inhaling the puffs of warm, sweet-scented breath as he passed, the cows watching him for a few moments, and then, evidently thinking fresh dewy grass preferable to the best of curates, they resumed their quiet “crop crop” of the verdant meal.

The meadow crossed, another gate led back into the garden, where a long glass-house stood with open door inviting the Reverend Arthur to enter and breathe the warm, deliciously-scented air. The sun was shining brightly and came in a shower of rays upon the red-bricked floor, broken up as it were by the silvery shoots of the vines whose leaves were fringed with drops of pearly dew.

A glance at the leafy roof displayed so much attention needed that the Reverend Arthur, after a little contemplation and a few moral comparisons between the wild growth of the vine and that of the young and old of the parish, slowly took off his coat, lifted a heavy plank and placed it across two of the iron rafter-ties of the building; and after satisfying himself of its safety, mounting a pair of steps, climbing on to the plank, and seating himself in a very unclerical attitude, he began to snap off the redundant branches of the vine.

“Chirrup!” went a shrill whistle as the first branch was snapped, but the Reverend Arthur heard it not, and in a rapt, dreamy manner went on snapping off at their joints branch after branch just beyond where the young bunches of grapes were beginning to show.

“Chirrup!” went the whistle again, but still unheard, for the Reverend Arthur had just placed one of the succulent branches he had broken off between his lips, and, as if imitating the ways of Dewnose and Bessy, he was sedately munching away at the pleasant acid growth.

“Chirrup!” again, but this time in another direction, and, perfectly unconscious of the summons, the Reverend Arthur went on with his pruning, breakfasting the while off the tender acid shoots.

Chirrup after chirrup mingled with the songs of the birds, and at last the bustling little figure of the lady lately seen at the Rectory window appeared at the door.

“Why, here you are Arthur!” she exclaimed. “What a shame it is! You said you’d be down by the bees.”

“I’m—I’m very sorry, my dear Mary,” said the guilty truant, with a look of appeal in his face.

“That’s what you always say, sir, and here is the ham getting cold, the eggs will be quite hard, and I’ve got my feet soaking wet running all over the place.”

“I really am very sorry, my dear Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur, slowly descending from his perch.

“I never did see such a man,” cried the little lady, with her pleasant face a droll mixture of vexation and good-humour.

As she spoke she took up the curate’s long coat, and held it ready for him to put on, tip-toeing to enable him to thrust his long thin arms into the sleeves, and then tip-toeing a little more to reach up and give him a hearty kiss.

“There, I won’t be very cross,” she cried, “only there never was such a thoughtless, tiresome man before. Just look at your hands!”

“It’s only vine-juice, my dear Mary,” he said, looking at his long thin fingers in turn.

“Well, come along. You will have time to go and wash them while I change my shoes and stockings. Just look there.”

Miss Mary Rosebury made no hesitation about drawing her grey cloth dress aside to display a very prettily-shaped pair of feet and ankles, soaked with dew and muddied by the garden paths, before taking her brother, as it were, into custody and leading him up to the house.

Five minutes later they were in the prettily-furnished dining-room, before a most temptingly spread breakfast-table, where everything was clean and neat as the home of an old bachelor, tended by a maiden sister, might be expected to be. There were flowers and hand-painted screens; the linen was snowy white, and the eggs, and butter, and cream were as delicious as the coffee.

The morning prayers were read in presence of Cook and Jane; then the coffee was poured out in a dark amber stream, and for the first time the Reverend Arthur smiled.

"Really, my dear Mary," he said, "I don't think any two people could be happier than we are."

"Than we should be if you would not do such foolish things, Arthur," said the little lady, sharply.

"Foolish things, my dear?" he replied, rather blankly.

"Yes, foolish things. I don't mind your being so fond of your garden and natural history, but it doesn't look becoming for you to come back as you did yesterday, with a bunch of weeds in one hand, a bundle of mosses in the other, and your hat pinned all over with butterflies. The people think you half mad."

"But I had no pill-boxes, my dear Mary, and Thompson, of the Entomological, asked me to get him some of the large sulphurs."

"Then I wish Thompson, of the Entomological, would come down and catch his butterflies himself. Give me a bit more fat."

"For my part I should never wish to change."

"Well, I don't know," said the elderly lady, slowly, as she made a very hearty breakfast. "Little Magnus is very nice and the garden very pretty, but there seems to be a something wanting. Tilt the dish and give me a little more of that gravy, Arthur. Why don't you pass your cup?"

"And yet we have an abundance of the good things of this life, Mary, that we could not enjoy in a town."

"Ye-es," said the little lady, dubiously; "but still there seems to be a something wanting."

"I think we shall have plenty of honey this year, my dear Mary."

"So we did last year, Arthur."

"The mushrooms are coming on very fast in the pit. By the way, what did you do with those Saint George's agarics I brought home yesterday?"

"Threw them away."

"My dear Mary!"

"And the best thing too, Arthur. Now, once for all, mushrooms are mushrooms; but I'm not going to have you poison yourself nor me neither with all kinds of toadstools, to gratify your love of experiment."

The curate sighed, and there came a pause, broken by Miss Mary Rosebury saying:

"Yes, I suppose we ought to be perfectly contented, and I think I am; but sometimes it seems a pity that we should always go on like this without any change. Oh, here's Brown."

Volume One—Chapter Two.

A Dangerous Visitor.

Miss Mary Rosebury left her chair at the breakfast-table and hurried out to the rose-covered porch as a heavy step was heard upon the gravel; and directly after a sturdy-looking man, with half-a-dozen leather bags slung from his shoulder, appeared at the door.

"Fine morning, miss. Two letters—three letters—four letters. 'Stan'ard,' 'Gar'ner's Chronkle,' 'Beekeep's Junnel;' that's all, miss;" and before the little lady had had time to speak, the heavy step was receding over the gravel. "Four letters for you, Arthur. Shall I open them?"

"Please, my dear Mary," said the Reverend Arthur, without evincing the slightest interest in the arrival of the post, for he was carefully filling up the holes in some well-made dry toast with the freshest of fresh butter.

Miss Mary Rosebury laid the letters upon the table while she fished a spectacle-case from her pocket, balanced her glasses upon her rather decided-looking nose, gave the two little bunches of curls on either side of her white forehead a shake, and opened the first letter, reading aloud:

"'Messrs Spindle and Twist beg to call your attention to a very curious sherry, and'—um—um—um—um—Ah! you don't want to lay down sherry, do you, Arthur?"

"No, my dear Mary," said her brother; and letter number two was opened.

"Mr Hazelton is now prepared to make advances upon personal security to the clergy, gentry—' Bah! money-lenders!" exclaimed Miss Mary Rosebury, throwing aside the second letter. "I wish these people wouldn't bore us with their applications. What's this?"

As she spoke she took up a large blue official-looking envelope.

"Looks important, my dear Mary," said the Rev. Arthur, displaying a little more interest.

"Yes," said his sister, turning the letter over. "Oh! Arthur, suppose it means preferment at last—a vicarage somewhere."

"I don't think I should be very much pleased, my dear Mary. I am very happy here."

"Oh, yes, of course we are, Arthur; but as I have often said, there does seem to be a something wanting, and—'The directors of the New Polwheedle and Verity Friendship Tin Mining'—Oh, dear, dear, just as if we had money to throw down Cornish mines. What's this? I don't know this hand. There's a crest upon the envelope, and 'H.B.' in the corner. Oh! it's from Doctor Bolter."

"Postmark Penang?" said the Reverend Arthur. "Wondered I had not heard from him."

"No, it's from London. Let me see. All about specimens, I suppose."

My Dear Rosebury,—

I'm in England for a month or two, and am coming down to see you and chat over old times. Don't make any fuss, old fellow! Bed on a sofa will do for an old campaigner like me. I've got business your way—to see some young ladies at Mayleyfield—daughters of two people out in the Peninsula. Been educated at home, and I am going to be their escort back. Nuisance, but must do it; expect me to-morrow.

Yours very truly,—

Harry Bolter.

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury.

"Why, Arthur, he's coming here!"

"Yes, my dear. I'm very glad!"

"But to-day, Arthur! What shall I do?"

"Do, my dear Mary? Nothing! Bolter never wants anything done for him, unless he's very much altered, and I don't think he will be."

"But the young ladies at Mayleyfield? Why that must be at Miss Twettenham's establishment!"

"Very probably, my dear!" said the Reverend Arthur, getting up to walk up and down the room. "I shall be very, very glad to see Harry Bolter. I wonder whether he has brought any specimens?"

"To be sure, I've heard that the Misses Twettenham have several young ladies there whose parents are in India."

"Not India, my dear. Henry Bolter has been in the Malay Peninsula. He was at Singapore and then at Penang."

"And the house in such a terrible muddle!" exclaimed Miss Mary. "Whatever shall I do?"

"What a little world this is," said the Reverend Arthur. "How strange that Henry Bolter should, so to speak, have friends as near as Mayleyfield!"

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur, you really have no thought whatever! To-day is baking day!"

"I am very glad, my dear Mary! Henry Bolter was always, I remember, fond of new bread. We used to call him Hot-roll Bolter at college."

"Arthur!"

"Yes, my dear Mary."

"I really am thankful that you never married! You would have worried any reasonable woman into her grave!"

"I am very sorry. I hope not, my dear Mary! I think if I had ever seen any lady I should have liked to call my wife, my whole study would have been to make her happy!"

"Yes, yes, my dear Arthur!" said the little petulant lady, placing her hands upon her tall, thin brother's shoulders once more to pull him down to be kissed, "I know you would; but you are so tiresome."

"I'm—I'm afraid I am, my dear Mary. I think sometimes that I must be very stupid."

"Nonsense, Arthur; you are not. You are one of the best and cleverest of men; but you do get so lost in your studies that you forget all ordinary troubles of life. Why, there, actually you have come down this morning without any shirt-

collar."

"Have I? Have I, Mary?" said the Reverend Arthur, looking hastily in a glass. "How very foolish of me! I was anxious to get down, I suppose."

"What we are to do for dinner I don't know!" exclaimed Miss Mary. "The butcher won't kill till the day after to-morrow."

"Chickens," suggested her brother.

"You can't feed men always on chickens, Arthur."

"No, no, my dear; but Henry Bolter has been a great deal in the East; and you might do a deal with chickens."

"Oh, I know, Arthur," said the little lady, pettishly. "Roast and boiled."

"And curried! Bolter is sure to like curry."

"And then grumble at it, and say it is not as good as he gets abroad. You never have anything in the garden either!"

"I have some very fine asparagus, my dear Mary."

"Ah, well, that's something."

"And some forced rhubarb."

"I could use that too. But really it is too bad to take one so by surprise. Men are so unreasonable!"

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury took a turn or two up and down the room, with a troubled look in his face, ending by stopping short before his sister.

"I—I am very sorry, my dear Mary," he said. "Can I help you a little?"

"What by getting in the way, Arthur?" said the little lady, pettishly. "Nonsense! stuff!"

He smoothed his long, thin, closely-shaven face with one hand, gazing pensively at his sister.

"I—I used to be very fond of Henry Bolter," he said, in a hesitating way.

"Why?" she said sharply. "I don't believe in these very warm friendships between men!"

"It was when our father died, Mary, more than twenty years ago; and for want of a hundred pounds I thought I should have to leave college."

"Yes?" said the little lady, sharply.

"Henry Bolter found it out, and he forced the money into my hand."

"He did?"

"Yes, my dear Mary, and he never would let me pay it back again."

"But didn't you try, Arthur?"

"Four times over, my dear Mary; but he always sent the money back to me in a letter with only one word in it."

"And what was that?"

There was a dry, half-pitiful smile in the Reverend Arthur's face as he replied, gazing fixedly the while at his sister:

"'Beast!'"

"What, Arthur?"

"He said 'beast.' He met me afterwards, and vowed he would never speak to me again if I alluded to the money, which he said was a gift; and it has never been repaid to this day."

"Beast!" ejaculated Miss Mary, thoughtfully.

"Yes, my dear Mary, but I have that sum put away, ready for him to take when he will."

"Of course," said Miss Rosebury thoughtfully.

"And I should like to give Harry Bolter a warm welcome when he comes, Mary; not a welcome of corn and wine, oil, olive and honey, Mary—but a welcome from the heart, such as would please him more."

"My dear Arthur," cried the little lady, throwing her arms round her brother's lank, spare form, "you mustn't notice my crotchety ways, I'm getting an old woman—a fidgety old maid. Dr Bolter shall have as warm a welcome as I can give."

"I knew it sister," he said tenderly embracing her; and it was very foolish, but the eyes of both were wet with tears as the little lady snatched herself away.

"There, Arthur, now go, and don't you come near me again except to bring me the asparagus and rhubarb, for I shall be as busy as a bee. There's the doctor's room to prepare."

"No; let him have mine."

"What, with all that litter of dried plants and flies?"

"Just what he would like."

"There, go away."

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury was about to say something more, but his sister checked him, and in a thoughtful dreamy way, he went slowly out into the garden, where at the end of ten minutes he had forgotten rhubarb, asparagus, even the coming of Dr Bolter, for the sun had shone out very hot, and the bees in the fourth hive beginning from the top were threatening to swarm.

Volume One—Chapter Three.

The Young Ladies.

"The Firlawns, Mayleyfield, educational establishment for the daughters of officers and gentlemen in the Indian civil service, conducted by the Misses Twettenham," as it said in the old circulars, for none were ever issued now. Thirty years of the care of young people, committed to their charge by parents compelled to reside in the East, had placed the Misses Twettenham beyond the need of circular or other advertising advocate. For it was considered a stroke of good fortune by Indian and other officials if vacancies could be found at the Firlawns for their daughters; in fact the Misses Twettenham might have doubled their numbers and their prices too, but they were content to keep on in their old conservative way, enjoying the confidence of their patrons, and really acting the parts of mothers to the young ladies committed to their charge.

It was a difficult task as well as an onerous one, this care of girls from the ages of ten or twelve up to even twenty and one-and-twenty, especially when it is taken into consideration that, whatever the emergency, the parents would be in India, China, or the Eastern islands—one or two months' distance by letter, sometimes more.

It was not often that there were troubles, though, at the Firlawns, for the Misses Twettenham's was a kindly as well as rigid rule. Sickness of course there was from time to time. Sadder still, they had had deaths; but there were times when some young lady of more than ordinary volatility would try to assert herself and resent the bonds that the elderly sisters insisted upon tying round her and keeping her back.

There were occasionally handsome curates at Mayleyfield. There was a particularly good-looking young doctor's assistant once in the town; and at times Squire Morden's soldier and sailor sons would return home for a short stay, when a misguided pupil would form a most hopeless attachment, and even go so far as to receive a smuggled note.

Woe be to her if she did! It was sure to be discovered; and if such a course was persisted in the doom was certain. Transportation was the sentence. Word was sent to mamma and papa in India, China, or wherever they might be, and Miss Rebellious had to leave the school.

These were very, very rare cases, for there was scarcely a girl who did not look upon the elderly sisters as their best of friends; but such accidents had occurred, and there was trouble at the Firlawns now.

"Never," said Miss Twettenham to her sisters twain—"never, my dear Julia—never, my dear Maria, in the whole course of my experience, have I met with so determined, so obstinate a girl!"

"She is very beautiful," said Miss Julia.

"And it promises to be a fatal gift," said Miss Maria.

"Yes," said the eldest Miss Twettenham; "and if it were not for the letter we have received saying that Dr Bolter was coming to fetch her away, I should certainly have been compelled to insist upon her being recalled."

"I don't think she means harm, dear Hannah," said Miss Maria.

"No young lady brought up here could mean harm, Maria," said Miss Twettenham, severely; "but to witness in her such a terrible display of—of—of—I really cannot find a word."

"Coquetry," suggested Miss Julia.

"Well, coquetry," said Miss Twettenham, taking the word unwillingly, as if it were too bad to touch. "It is a terrible love of admiration!"

"What did she say, Hannah, when you spoke to her?"

"Laughed, my dear, in the most barefaced way, and said that it was all nonsense."

"But that dreadful half-haughty, half-shy way in which she looked at him!" said Miss Maria.

"And she almost smiled," said Miss Julia.

"Quite smiled!" said Miss Twettenham, severely. "I saw her smile at him; and then, when he lifted his hat, she raised her eyes and stared at him in a haughty, astonished way, as if she had never given him the slightest encouragement."

"It is very shocking," murmured Miss Maria.

"But I think she blushed a little," remonstrated Miss Julia, as if to try and find some slight extenuating circumstance for the benefit of the most handsome pupil at the Firlawns.

"That I deny!" exclaimed Miss Twettenham. "It was only the reflection from the lining of her sunshade! I repeat it, sisters; I am very—very glad she is going away!"

"So am I," said Miss Julia; "and yet I am sorry, for she is a very beautiful girl, and I am sure she is affectionate."

"What is beauty without ballast, my dear Julia? or affection that goes floating about like a gossamer without a stay?" said Miss Twettenham severely, and her sisters sighed.

"I consider it most reprehensible. And now I think we will have her down."

The three grey, elderly ladies seated themselves in three stiff-backed, uneasy chairs, wool-worked by former pupils; and as soon as they had settled themselves in severe attitudes, Miss Twettenham gave a long wool-worked bell-pull a decided tug.

The bell was answered by a quiet, elderly manservant in a neat livery.

"Send word to Fräulein Webling's room that we wish to see Miss Perowne and Miss Stuart," said Miss Twettenham; and after sitting in frigid silence for a few minutes, the two young ladies were ushered into the presence of the principals.

There was a marked contrast between the girls, one being tall, with a finely-shaped oval face, dark hair, and peculiarly lustrous eyes, fringed by long black lashes; the other decidedly *petite*, with the clear skin, blue-grey eyes, and fair hair suggestive of the North.

The dark girl was perfectly composed, and walked over the well-worn carpet with an easy, graceful carriage, and a look of languid indifference, far from being shared by her companion, whose cheeks were flushed as she darted an uneasy look at the three sisters in turn.

The young ladies evidently expected to be asked to take chairs, but the words were not forthcoming; and after advancing a few paces, they stopped short in the midst of a chilling silence, the three sisters sitting very upright with mittened hands crossed in a peculiar way about the region of the waist of their old-fashioned dresses.

The dark girl, after a languid glance round, gave her shapely shoulders a slight shrug before half closing her eyes, and gazing through the tall, blank window at a scaly araucaria upon the lawn.

At last Miss Twettenham spoke:

"Miss Stuart," she began, in chilling tones and with great deliberation, "speaking for myself and sisters, I must say that I sadly regret that we are under the necessity of drawing you into the discussion that is about to take place."

"But, at the same time, my dear," continued Miss Julia, in precisely the same formal tone, "we wish to tell you that we exonerate you from all blame in the matter."

"And," concluded Miss Maria, "we are glad to say that your conduct since you have been under our care has been all that could be desired."

The fair girl made a half step forward, her eyes filling with tears, and one hand was involuntarily raised, as if she would have liked to place it in that of the last speaker; but the three sisters drew themselves up a little more rigidly, and, as if in concert, drew in a long breath.

The dark girl smiled faintly and looked bored.

"It is an unpleasant thing for you to do, Miss Stuart, to have to bear witness against your schoolfellow and companion," resumed Miss Twettenham, her sisters tightening their lips as if to rigidly keep in the indignation they felt, and to subdue their desire to interrupt their elder, who, by right of seniority, was the principal spokeswoman upon such occasions.

The dark girl raised her eyebrows slightly, and the corners of her well-shaped mouth twitched, and were drawn down in a provokingly attractive manner.

"Will you kindly inform me, Miss Twettenham," she said, in a low, sweet voice, full of *hauteur*, "why I am to be subjected to this examination? Of what am I accused?"

"Why, you know!" exclaimed Miss Maria, excitedly. "Of smiling at a man, miss!" and she seemed to shudder with indignant protest.

"My dear Maria," exclaimed Miss Twettenham, severely, "you forget."

"I beg your pardon, my dear Hannah!" exclaimed the younger sister, and she drew herself up and tightened her lips more and more.

"I had intended to have approached the subject with more de—I mean caution," continued Miss Twettenham; "but since my sister has spoken out so plainly, I will only say that your conduct yesterday, Miss Perowne, places me under the necessity of confining your future walks to the garden."

"My conduct?" said the girl, turning her dark eyes full upon the speaker.

"Your conduct, Miss Helen Perowne," said the elder lady austerely. "It has for months past been far from in accordance with that we expect from the young ladies placed by their parents in our charge; but yesterday it culminated in the smile and look of intelligence we saw pass between you and that tall, fair gentleman who has of late haunted the outskirts of this place. I think I have your approval in what I say?" she added, turning to her sisters, who both bowed stiffly, and became more rigid than before.

"Such conduct is worse than unbecoming. It is unladylike to a degree, and what is more, displays so great a want of womanly dignity and self-respect that I am reluctantly compelled to say that we feel our endeavours to instil a right moral tone and thoroughly decorous idea of a young lady's duties to have been thrown away."

There was a slight twitching of the corners of the mouth and an involuntary shrugging of the shoulders here.

"You are aware, Miss Perowne, that your papa has requested us to resign you to the care of his friend, Dr Bolter, and that in a short time you will cease to be our pupil; but still, while you stay at the Firlawns, we must exact a rigid obedience to our rules, and, as I have said, your liberty must be sadly curtailed while you are in our charge."

"As you please," said the girl, indifferently.

"You do not deny your fault, then?"

"No," said the girl, without turning her eyes from the window.

"Who was this gentleman—I should say, who is this gentleman?"

"I really do not know," said the girl, turning from the window now with a careless look in her eyes, as if of wonder that she should be asked such a question.

"Have you had any epistolary communication?" said Miss Twettenham, sternly.

"Not the slightest," said the girl, coldly; and then she added, after a pause, "If I had I should not have told you!"

"Miss Perowne!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Twettenham, indignantly.

"Miss Twettenham," exclaimed the girl, drawing herself up, and with a flash from her dark eyes full of defiance, "you forget that I am no longer a child. It has suited my father's purpose to have me detained here among school-children until he found a suitable escort for my return to the East; but I am a woman. As to that absurd episode, it is beneath my notice."

"Beneath your notice!" exclaimed Miss Twettenham, while her sisters looked astounded.

The fair girl laid her hand upon her companion's arm, but Helen Perowne snatched hers away.

"I say beneath my notice. A foolish young man thinks proper to stare at me and raises his hat probably at the whole school."

"At you, Miss Helen Perowne—at you!" exclaimed Miss Twettenham.

"Possibly," said the girl, carelessly, as the flash died out of her eyes, her lids drooped, and she let her gaze wander to the window.

"I can scarcely tell you how grieved—how hurt we feel," continued Miss Twettenham, "to find that a young lady who has for so many years enjoyed the—the care, the instruction, the direction of our establishment, should have set so terrible an example to her fellow-pupils."

The girl shrugged her shoulders again slightly, and her face assumed a more indifferent air.

"The time that you have to stay here, Miss Perowne, is very short," continued the speaker; "but while you do stay it will be under rigid supervision. You may now retire to your room."

The girl turned away, and was walking straight out of the room, but years of lessons in deportment asserted themselves, and from sheer habit she turned by the door to make a stately courtesy, frowning and biting her lip directly after as if from annoyance, and passing out with the grace and proud carriage of an Eastern queen.

"Stop, Miss Stuart," said Miss Twettenham, as Helen Perowne's companion was about to follow. "I wish to say a few words to you before you go—not words of anger, my dear child, for the only pain we have suffered through you is in hearing the news that you are so soon to go."

"Oh, Miss Twettenham," exclaimed the girl, hurrying to take the extended hands of the schoolmistress, but to find herself pressed to the old lady's heart, an embrace which she received in turn from Miss Julia and Miss Maria.

"We have long felt that it must soon come, my dear," chirped Miss Maria.

"Yes, dear," said Miss Julia, in a prattling way. "You've done scolding now, sister, have you not?"

"Yes," said Miss Twettenham; "but I wish to speak seriously for a minute or two, and the present seems a favourable opportunity for Grey Stuart to hear."

The younger sisters placed the fair young girl in a chair between them, and each held a hand, while Miss Twettenham drew herself up stiffly, hemmed twice, and began:

"My dear Miss Stuart—I—I—Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!"

The poor old lady burst into a violent fit of sobbing as she rose from her seat, for nature was stronger than the stiff varnish of art with which she was encrusted; and holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she crossed the little space between them, and sank down upon her knees before Grey Stuart, passing her arms round her and drawing her to her breast.

For a few minutes nothing was heard in the stiff old-fashioned drawing-room but suppressed sobs, for the younger sisters wept in concert, and the moist contagion extended to Grey Stuart, whose tears fell fast.

There was no buckram stiffness in Miss Twettenham's words when she spoke again, but a very tender, affectionate shake in her voice.

"It is very weak and foolish, my dear," she said, "but we were all very much upset; for there is something so shocking in seeing one so young and beautiful as Helen Perowne deliberately defy the best of advice, and persist in going on in her own wilful way. We are schoolmistresses, my dear Grey, and I know we are very formal and stiff; but though we have never been married ladies to have little children of our own, I am sure we have grown to love those placed in our care, so that often and often, when some pupil has been taken away to go to those far-off burning lands, it has been to us like losing a child."

"Yes—yes," sobbed the younger sisters in concert.

"And now, my dear Grey, I think I can speak a little more firmly. You are a woman grown now, my dear, and I hope feel with us in our trouble."

"Indeed—indeed I do!" exclaimed Grey, eagerly.

"I know you do, my darling, so now listen. You know how sweet a jewel is a woman's modesty, and how great a safeguard is her innocency? I need say little to you of yourself, now that you are going far across the sea; but we, my sisters and I, pray earnestly for your help in trying to exercise some influence over Helen's future. You will be together, and I know what your example will be; but still I shudder as I think of what her future is to be, out there at some station where ladies are so few that they all get married as soon as they go out."

This was rather an incongruous ending to Miss Twettenham's speech, but the old lady's eyes bespoke her trouble, and she went on:

"It seems to me, my dear, that, with her love of admiration, she will be like a firebrand in the camp, and I shudder when I think of what Mr Perowne will say, when I'm sure, sisters, we have striven our very best."

"Indeed, indeed we have."

"Then we can do no more," sighed Miss Twettenham, who now smiled in a very pleasant, motherly way. "There, Grey, my dear, I am not going to cross-examine you about this naughty child, and we will say no more now. Some tender young plants grow as they are trained, and some persist in growing wild. I tremble for our handsome pupil, and shall often wonder in the future how she fares, but promise me that you will be to her the best of friends."

"Indeed I will," said Grey earnestly.

"It will be a thankless office," said Miss Julia.

"And cause you many a heartache, Grey Stuart," said Miss Maria.

"Yes, but Grey Stuart will not pay heed to that when she knows it is her duty," said Miss Twettenham, smiling. "Leave us now, my dear; we must have a quiet talk about Helen, and our arrangements while she stays. Good-bye, my child."

The *good-bye* on the old lady's lips was a genuine God be with you, and an affectionate kiss touched Grey Stuart's cheek, as she left the room, fluttered and in trouble about her schoolfellow, as the prophetic words of her teachers kept repeating themselves in her ears.

Volume One—Chapter Four.

Dr Bolter's Question.

"Dr Bolter, ma'am," said the elderly manservant, seeking Miss Twettenham the next afternoon, as she was sunning herself in a favourite corner of the garden, where a large heavily-backed rustic seat stood against the red-brick wall.

The pupils were out walking with her two sisters—all save Helen Perowne and Grey Stuart, who were prisoners; and Miss Twettenham was just wondering how it was that a little tuft of green, velvety moss should have fallen from the wall upon her cap, when the old serving-man came up.

“Dr Bolter! Dear me! So soon!” exclaimed the old lady, glancing at Helen Perowne, book in hand, walking up and down the lawn, while Grey Stuart was at some little distance, tying up the blossoms of a flower.

Miss Twettenham entered the drawing-room, and then stood gazing in wonder at the little plump, brisk-looking man, with a rosy face, in spite of the deep bronze to which it was burned by exposure to the sun and air.

He was evidently about seven or eight and forty, but full of life and energy; a couple of clear grey eyes looking out from beneath a pair of rather shaggy eyebrows—for his face was better supplied with hirsute appendages than his head—a large portion of which was very white and smooth, seeming to be polished to the highest pitch, and contrasting strangely with his sunbrowned face.

As Miss Twettenham entered, the little doctor was going on tiptoe, with open hands, towards the window, where he dexterously caught a large fly, and after placing it conveniently between the finger and thumb of his left hand, he drew a lens from his waistcoat pocket, and began examining his prize.

“Hum! Yes,” he said, in a low, thoughtful tone, “decided similarity in the trunk. Eyes rather larger. Intersection of—I beg your pardon! Miss Twettenham?”

The lady bowed, and looked rather dignified. Catching flies and examining them in her drawing-room by means of a lens was an unusual proceeding, especially when there were so many much worthier objects for examination in the shape of pupils’ drawings and needlework about the place.

Miss Twettenham softened though directly, for the manners of Dr Bolter were, she owned, perfect. Nothing could have been more gentlemanly than the way in which he waited for her to be seated, and then, after a chatty introduction, came to the object of his visit.

“You see, my dear madam, it happens so opportunely my being in England. Perowne and Stuart are both old friends and patients, and of course they did not like the idea of their daughters being entrusted to comparative strangers.”

“So you will be friend, guardian, and medical attendant all in one?” said Miss Twettenham, smiling.

“Exactly,” said the little doctor. “I have never seen them; they are quite schoolgirls—children, I suppose?”

“Ye-es,” said Miss Twettenham, who had a habit of measuring a young lady’s age by its distance from her own, “they are very young.”

“No joke of a task, my dear madam, undertaking the charge of two young ladies—and I hope from my heart they are too young and plain to be attractive—make it difficult for me.”

There was a bright red spot on each of Miss Twettenham’s cheeks, and she replied with a little hesitation:

“They are both young, and you will find in Miss Stuart a young lady of great sweetness and promise.”

“Glad to hear it, my dear madam. Her father is a very dry Scot, very quaint and parsimonious, but a good fellow at heart.”

“Most punctual in his payments,” said Miss Twettenham, with dignity.

“Oh, of course, of course!” said Dr Bolter. “More so, I’ll be bound, than Perowne.”

“Mr Perowne is not so observant of dates as Mr Stuart, I must own, Dr Bolter,” said Miss Twettenham.

“No, my dear madam; but he is as rich as a Jew. Very good fellow, Perowne?”

Miss Twettenham bowed rather stiffly.

“Well, my dear madam, I am not going to rob you of your pupils for several weeks yet, but I should like to make their acquaintance and get them a little used to me before we start on our long voyage.”

“They are in the garden, Dr Bolter,” said Miss Twettenham, rising. “I will have them sent for—or would you—”

“Like to join them in the garden? Most happy!”

Miss Twettenham led the way towards a handsome conservatory, through which there was a flight of steps descending to the lawn.

“Dear me! ah, yes!” exclaimed the doctor. “Very nice display of flowers! Would you allow me? My own collections in the jungle—passiflora—convolvulaciae—acacia.”

He drew some dry seeds from his pocket, and placed them in the old lady’s hand, she taking them with a smile and a bow; after which they descended to the soft, velvety, well-kept lawn.

“Most charming garden!” said the doctor—“quite a little paradise! but no Eves—no young ladies!”

“They are all taking their afternoon walk except Miss Stuart and Miss Perowne,” replied the old lady. “Oh!”

She uttered a sharp ejaculation as a stone struck her upon the collarbone and then fell at the doctor's feet, that gentleman picking it up with one hand as he adjusted his double eyeglass with the other.

"Hum! ha!" he said drily. "We get our post very irregularly out in the East; but they don't throw the letters at us over the wall."

Miss Twettenham's hands trembled as she hastily snatched the stone, to which a closely-folded note was attached by an india-rubber band, from the Doctor's hands.

"What will he think of our establishment?" mentally exclaimed the poor little old lady, as she glanced at the superscription, and saw that it was for Helen Perowne. "I have never had such a thing occur since Miss Bainbridge was sent away."

"So Miss Perowne receives notes thrown to her over the garden wall, eh?" said the little doctor severely.

"Indeed, Dr Bolter—I assure you—I am shocked—I hardly know—the young ladies have been kept in—I only discovered—"

"Hum!" ejaculated the doctor, frowning. "I am rather surprised. Let me see," he continued. "I suppose that fair-haired girl stooping over the flower-bed yonder is Miss Perowne, eh?"

"My sight is failing," stammered Miss Twettenham, who was terribly agitated at the untoward incident; "but your description answers to Miss Stuart."

"And that's Miss Stuart is it? Hum! Too far off to see what she is like. Then I suppose that tall dark girl on the seat is Miss Perowne?"

"Tall and dark—yes," said Miss Twettenham, in an agitated way. "Is she sitting down? You said tall?"

"Hum! no," said the doctor, balancing his glasses; "she is standing right on the top of the back of a seat, and seems to be looking over the garden wall."

"Oh!"

"Bless my heart! Hum! Sham or real?" muttered the doctor.

Real enough, for the agitation had been too much for the poor old lady, so proud of the reputation of her school. A note over the garden wall—a young lady looking over into the lane, perhaps in conversation with a man, and just when a stranger had arrived to act as escort for two finished pupils. It was too much.

For the first time for many years Miss Twettenham had fainted away.

Volume One—Chapter Five.

A Very Nice Little Woman.

"Fainted dead away, Arthur; fainted dead away, Miss Rosebury; and until I shouted aloud there was my fair pussy peeping out of paradise over the wall to see if a young Adam was coming. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I am very much surprised, Dr Bolter," said Miss Rosebury, severely; "I always thought the Miss Twettenham's was a most strictly-conducted establishment?"

"So it is, my dear madam—so it is; but they've got one little black ewe lamb in the flock, and the old ladies told me that if my young lady had not been about to leave they'd have sent her away."

"And very properly," said Miss Rosebury, tightening her lips and slightly agitating her curls.

"And did the lady soon come to, Harry?" said the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, for he seemed to be much interested in his friend's discourse over the dessert.

"Oh, yes, very soon. When I shouted, the dark nymph hopped off the garden-seat, and the fair one came running from the flowers, and we soon brought her to. Then I had a good look at the girls."

Miss Rosebury's rather pleasantly-shaped mouth was fast beginning to assume the form of a thin red line, so tightly were her lips compressed.

"By George, sir! what a girl! A graceful Juno, sir; the handsomest woman I ever saw. I was staggered. Bless my soul, Miss Rosebury, here's Perowne and here's Stuart; they say to me, 'You may as well take charge of my girl and see her safe back here,' and being a good-natured sort of fellow—"

"As you always were, Harry," said the Reverend Arthur, beaming mildly upon his friend, while Miss Rosebury's lips relaxed a little.

"All rubbish! Stuff, man! Well, I said *yes*, of course, and I imagined a couple of strips of schoolgirls that I could chat to, and tell them about the sea, and tie on their pinafores before breakfast and dinner, and give them a dose of medicine once a week; while here I am dropped in for being guardian to a couple of beautiful women—girls who will set our jungles on fire with their eyes, sir. By George, it's a startler, sir, and no mistake."

"Dr Bolter seems to be an admirer of female beauty," said Miss Rosebury, rather drily.

"Not a bit of it, madam. By George, no! Ladies? Why, they have always seemed to be studies to me—objects of natural history. Very beautiful from their construction, and I shouldn't have noticed these two only that, by George! I've got to take charge of them—deliver them safe and sound to their papas—with care—this side up; and the first thing I find is that they've got eyes that will drive our young fellows wild, and one of them—the peep out of paradise one—knows it too. Nice job for a quiet old bachelor, eh?"

"You don't tell us anything about yourself, Harry," said the Reverend Arthur; and Miss Rosebury seemed a little more at her ease.

"Nothing to tell you, my boy. Claret? Yes, thanks. Have you such a thing as a lemon, Miss Rosebury?"

Miss Rosebury had, and as she rang she smiled with satisfaction at being able to supply the wants of the bright little man who had been so true a friend to her brother in the days gone by.

"Thank you, Miss Rosebury. Tumbler—water. Thanks. The lemon is, I think, the king of fruits, and invaluable to man. Deliciously acid, a marvellous quencher of thirst, a corrective, highly aromatic, a perfect boon. I would leave all the finest wines in the world for a lemon."

"Then you believe all intoxicating drinks to be bad, doctor?" said Miss Rosebury, eagerly.

"Except whiskey, my dear madam," said the doctor, with a twinkle of the eye.

"Ah!" said Miss Rosebury, and the eager smile upon her lips faded; but as she saw the zest with which the doctor rolled the lemon soft, and after cutting it in half, squeezed the juice and pulp into his glass, she relaxed a little, and directly afterwards began to beam, as the doctor suddenly exclaimed:

"There, madam, smell my hands! There's scent! Talk of eau-de-cologne, and millefleurs, and jockey club! Nothing to it! But come, Arthur, you don't tell me about yourself."

"About myself," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling blandly; "I have nothing to tell. You have seen my village; you have looked at my church; you have been through my garden; and you have had a rummage in my study. There is my life."

"A blessed one—a happy one, my dear Arthur. A perfect little home, presided over by a lady whose presence shows itself at every turn. Miss Rosebury," said the doctor, rising, "when I think of my own vagabond life, journeying here and there with my regiment through heat and cold, in civilisation and out, and after many wanderings, come back to this peaceful spot, this little haven of rest, I see what a happy man my old friend must be, and I envy him with all my heart."

He reseated himself, and Miss Rosebury's lips ceased to be compressed into a tight line; and as she smiled and nodded pleasantly, she glanced across at her brother, to see if he would speak, before replying that, pleasant as their home was, they had their troubles in the parish.

"And I have no end of trouble with Arthur," she continued. "He is so terribly forgetful!"

"He always was, my dear madam," said the little doctor. "If you wanted him to keep an appointment in the old college days you had to write it down upon eight pieces of paper, and place one in each of his pockets, and pin the eighth in his hat. Then you might, perhaps, see him at the appointed time."

"Oh, no, no, Harry! too bad—too bad!" murmured the Reverend Arthur, smiling and shaking his head.

"Well, really, Arthur," said his sister, "I don't think there is much exaggeration in what Dr Bolter says."

"I am very sorry," said the Reverend Arthur, meekly. "I suppose I am far from perfect."

"My dear old boy, you are perfect enough. You are just right; and though your dear sister here gives you a good scolding sometimes, I'll be bound to say she thinks you are the finest brother under the sun!"

Miss Rosebury left her chair with a very pleasant smile upon her lips, and a twinkling in the eyes that had the effect of making her look ten years younger.

"I am going into the drawing-room," she said, in a quick little decided way. "Arthur, dear, I daresay Dr Bolter would like to smoke."

"But, my dear madam, it would be profanity here."

"Then you shall be profane, doctor," said the little lady, nodding and smiling, "but don't let Arthur smoke. He tried once before when he had a friend to dinner, and it made him feel very, very sick."

The Reverend Arthur raised his eyebrows in a deprecating way, and then shook his head sadly.

"Then I will not lure him on to indulgence in such a bad habit, Miss Rosebury," said the little doctor. "In fact, I feel that I ought not to indulge myself."

"Well, I really think it is very shocking, doctor!" said Miss Rosebury, merrily. "You, a medical man, and you have confessed to a love for whiskey, and now for tobacco."

"No, no; no, no!" he cried holding up his hands. "They are nauseous medicines that I take to do me good."

"Indeed!" said the little lady, lingering in the room, and hanging about her brother's chair as if loth to go; and there was a very sarcastic ring in her voice.

"Oh, be merciful, Miss Rosebury!" said the doctor, laughing. "I am only a weak man—a solitary wanderer upon the face of the earth! I have no pleasant home. I have no sister to keep house."

"And keep you in order," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling pleasantly.

"And to keep me in order!" cried the doctor. "Mine's a hard life, Miss Rosebury, and with all a man's vanity—a little man's vanity, for we little men have a great deal of conceit to make up for our want of stature—I think I do deserve a few creature comforts."

"Which you shall have while you stay, doctor; so now light your cigar, for I'll be bound to say you have a store of the little black rolls somewhere about you."

"I confess," he said, smiling, "I carry them in the same case with a few surgical instruments."

"But I think we'll go into the little greenhouse, Mary," said the Reverend Arthur. "I feel sure Harry Bolter would not mind."

"Mind? My dear Miss Rosebury, I'll go and sit outside on a gate and smoke if you like."

"No, no," said the Reverend Arthur, mildly; "the green fly are rather gaining ground amongst my flowers, and I thought it would kill a few."

"Dr Bolter is going to smoke his cigar here, where I am about to send in the coffee," said Miss Rosebury, very decidedly, and the Reverend Arthur directed an apologetic look at his old friend.

"Hah!" ejaculated the little doctor, taking out his case, and selecting a cigar, "that's just the kind of social tyranny I like. A man, sir, is stronger than a woman in physical development, but weaker in the matter of making up his mind. I never am able to make up mine, and I am quite sure, Arthur, old fellow, that you are very weak in the matter of making up yours: thus, in steps the presiding genius of your house, and bids you do this, and you do it. Yes, Miss Rosebury, I am going to sit here and smoke and—"

"I am ready with a light, Dr Bolter," said the little lady, standing close by with a box and a wax-match in her hands.

"No, no, really, my dear madam, I could not think of beginning while you are here."

Scratch! went the match; there was a flash from the composition, and then Miss Rosebury's plump taper little fingers held out the tiny wax-light, which was taken; there were a few puffs of bluish smoke, and Dr Bolter sank back in his chair, gazing at the door through which Miss Rosebury had passed.

"Hah!" he ejaculated. "I shall have to be off to-morrow."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the Reverend Arthur. "I thought you would come and stay a month."

"Stay a month!" cried the doctor. "Why, my dear boy, what should I be fit for afterwards if I did?"

"Fit for, Harry?"

"Yes, fit for. I should be totally spoiled. I should become a complete domestic sybarite, and no more fit to go back to my tasks in the Malay jungle than to fly. No, Arthur, old fellow, it would never do."

"We shall keep you as long as you can stay," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling. "But seriously, did you not exaggerate about those young ladies?"

"Not in the least, my dear boy, as far as regards one of them. The other—old Stuart's little lassie—seems to be all that is pretty and demure. But I don't suppose there is any harm in Helen Perowne. She is a very handsome girl of about twenty or one-and-twenty, and I suppose she has been kept shut up there by the old ladies, and probably, with the best intentions, treated like a child."

"That must be rather a mistake," murmured the Reverend Arthur, dreamily.

"A mistake, sir, decidedly. If you have sons or daughters never forget that they grow up to maturity; and if you wish to keep them caged up, let it be in a cage whose bars are composed of good training, confidence and belief in the principles you have sought to instil."

"Yes, I quite agree with you, Harry."

"Why, my dear boy, what can be more absurd than to take a handsome young girl and tell her that men are a kind of wild beast that must never be looked at, much more spoken to—suppressing all the young aspirations of her heart?"

"I suppose it would be wrong, Harry."

"Wrong and absurd, sir. There is the vigorous young growth that will have play, and you tighten it up in a pair of moral stays, so to speak, with the result that the growth pushes forth in an abnormal way to the detriment of the subject; and in the future you have a moral distortion instead of a healthy young plant. Ha—ha!—ha—ha!"

"Why do you laugh?" said the Reverend Arthur. "I think what you have said quite right, only that ladies like the Misses Twettenham are, as it were, forced to a very rigid course."

"Yes, yes, exactly. I was laughing because it seems so absurd for a pair of old fogies of bachelors like us to be laying down the law as to the management and training of young girls. But look here, Arthur, old fellow, as I am in for this job of guardian to these girls, I should like to have something intermediate."

"Something intermediate? I don't understand you. Thank you; set the coffee down, Betsey."

"Hah! Yes; capital cup of coffee, Arthur," said the doctor, after a pause. "Best cup I've tasted for years."

"Yes, it is nice," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling, as if gratified at his friend's satisfaction. "My sister always makes it herself."

"That woman's a treasure, sir. Might I ask for another cup?"

"Of course, my dear Harry. Pray consider that you are at home."

The coffee was rung for and brought, after a whispered conversation between Betsey the maid and Miss Mary the mistress.

"What did they ring for, Betsey?" asked Miss Mary.

"The little gentleman wants some more coffee, ma'am."

"Then he likes it," said Miss Mary, who somehow seemed unduly excited. "But hush, Betsey; you must not say 'the little gentleman,' but 'Dr Bolter.' He is your master's dearest friend."

A minute or two later the maid came out from the little dining-room, with scarlet cheeks and wide-open eyes, to where Miss Mary was lying in wait.

"Is anything the matter, Betsey?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, ma'am, only the little Dr Bolter, ma'am, he took up the cup and smelt it, just as if it was a smelling-bottle or one of master's roses, ma'am."

"Yes—yes," whispered Miss Mary, impatiently.

"And then he put about ten lumps of sugar in it, ma'am."

"How many Betsey?"

"Ten big lumps, mum, and tasted; and while I was clearing away he said, 'Hambrosher!' I don't know what he meant, but that's what he said, mum."

"That will do, Betsey," whispered Miss Mary. "Mind that the heater is very hot. I'll come and cut the bread and butter myself."

Betsey went her way, and Miss Mary returned to the little drawing-room, uttering a sigh of satisfaction; and it is worthy of record, that before closing the door she sniffed twice, and thought that at a distance the smell of cigars was after all not so very bad.

Meanwhile the conversation had been continued in the dining-room.

"What do I mean by intermediate, Arthur? Well, I don't want to take those girls at one jump from the conventual seclusion of their school to what would seem to them like the wild gaiety of one of the great steamers of the *Messageries Maritimes*. I should like to give them a little society first."

"Exactly; very wisely," assented the Reverend Arthur.

"So I thought if your sister would call on the Misses Twettenham with you, and you would have them here two or three times to spend the day, and a little of that sort of thing, do you see?"

"Certainly. We will talk to Mary about it when we go in to tea. I am sure she would be very pleased."

"That's right; and now what do you say to a trot in the garden?"

"I shall be delighted!" was the reply; and they went out of the French window into the warm glow of the soft spring evening, the doctor throwing away the stump of his cigar as they came in sight of Miss Mary with a handkerchief tied lightly over her head, busy at work with scissors and basket cutting some flowers; and for the next hour they were walking up and down listening to the doctor's account of Malaya—its heat, its thunder-storms, and tropic rains; the beauties of the vegetation; the glories of its nights when the fire-flies were scintillating amidst the trees and shrubs that overhung the river, and so on, for the doctor never seemed to tire.

"How anxious you must be to return, doctor!" said little Miss Rosebury at last.

"No," he said, frankly. "No, I am not. I am very happy here in this charming little home; but when I go back, I hope to be as happy there, for I shall be busy, and work has its pleasures."

Brother and sister assented, and soon after they went in to tea, over which the visiting question was broached, and after looking rather severe, little Miss Rosebury readily assented to call and invite the young ladies to spend a day.

The evening glided away like magic; and before the doctor could credit that it was so late, he had to say "good-night," and was ushered into his bedroom.

"Hah!" ejaculated the little man as he sank into a soft easy-chair, covered with snow-white dimity, and gazed at the white hangings, the pretty paper, the spotless furniture, and breathed in the pleasant scent of fresh flowers, of which there was a large bunch upon his dressing table. "Hah!" he ejaculated again, and rising softly, he went to the table and looked at the blossoms.

"Why, those are the flowers she was cutting when we went down the garden," he said to himself; and he went back to his chair and became very thoughtful.

At the end of a quarter of an hour he wound up his watch and placed it beneath his pillow, and then stood thinking for a few minutes before slowly pulling off his boots.

As he took off one, he took it up meditatively, gazed at the sole, and then at the interior, saying softly:

"She is really a very nice little woman!"

Then he took off the other boot, and whispered the same sentiment in that, and all in the most serious manner; while just before dropping off into a pleasant, restful sleep, he said, quite aloud this time:

"A very nice little woman indeed!"

Volume One—Chapter Six.

Visitors at the Rectory.

The fact of its being the wish of the appointed guardian of the young ladies was sufficient to make the Misses Twettenham readily acquiesce to an invitation being accepted; and before many days had passed little Miss Rosebury drove over in the pony-carriage, into the front seat of which Helen Perowne, in the richest dress she possessed, glided with a grace and dignity that seemed to say she was conferring a favour.

"I wish you could drive, my dear," said little Miss Rosebury, smiling in Grey Stuart's face, for there was something in the fair young countenance which attracted her.

"May I ask why?" replied Grey.

"Because it seems so rude to make you take the back seat."

For answer Grey nimbly took her place behind; while, as Helen Perowne settled herself in a graceful, reclining attitude, Miss Rosebury took her seat, the round fat pony tossed its head, hands were waved, and away the little carriage spun along the ten miles' drive between Mayleyfield and the Rectory.

Helen was languid and quiet, leaning back with her eyes half closed, while Grey bent forward between them and chatted with Miss Rosebury, the little lady seeming to be at home with her at once.

Before they had gone a mile, though, the observant charioteer noticed that Grey started and coloured vividly at the sight of a tall, thin youth with a downy moustache, who eagerly raised his hat, as if to show his fair curly hair as they passed.

"Then she has a lover too," said Miss Rosebury to herself; for Helen Perowne sat unmoved, and did not appear to see the tall youth as they drove by him, but kept her eyes half closed, the long lashes drooping almost to her cheeks.

Little Miss Rosebury darted a keen glance at both the girls in turn, to see Grey Stuart colour more deeply still beneath her scrutiny; while Helen Perowne raised her eyes on finding Miss Rosebury looking at her, and smiled, her face wearing an enquiring look the while.

Dr Bolter had gone to town on business, so it had been decided that the visitors should stay for a couple of nights at the Rectory, where the Reverend Arthur, trowel in one hand, basket in the other, was busy at work filling the beds with geraniums when the pony-carriage drew up.

He slowly placed basket and trowel upon the grass as the carriage stopped, and forgetful of the state of his hands, helped the ladies to alight, leaving the imprint of his earthy fingers upon Helen's delicate gloves.

Grey saw what took place, and expected an angry show of impatience on her companion's part; but on the contrary, Helen held up her hands and laughed in quite a merry way.

"Oh, Arthur," exclaimed Miss Rosebury, "how thoughtless you are!"

The Reverend Arthur looked in dismay at the mischief he had done, and taking out his pocket-handkerchief—one that had evidently been used for wiping earthy fingers before—he deliberately took first one and then the other of Helen Perowne's hands to try and remove the marks he had made upon her gloves.

"I am very sorry, Miss Perowne," he said, in his quiet, deliberate way. "It was very thoughtless of me; I have been

planting geraniums.”

To the amazement of Grey Stuart, Helen gazed full in the curate’s face, smilingly surrendering her hands to the tender dusting they received.

Miss Rosebury was evidently annoyed, for she turned from surrendering the reins to the gardener, who was waiting to lead away the pony, and exclaimed:

“Oh, Arthur, you foolish man, what are you doing? Miss Perowne’s hands are not the leaves of plants.”

“No, my dear Mary,” said the Reverend Arthur, in the most serious manner; “and I am afraid I have made the mischief worse.”

“It does not matter, Mr Rosebury. It is only a pair of gloves—I have plenty more,” said Helen, hastily stripping them off regardless of buttons, and tearing them in the effort. They were of the thinnest and finest French kid, and as she hastily rolled them up she looked laughingly round for a place to throw them, ending by dropping them into the large garden basket half full of little geranium pots, while the Reverend Arthur’s eyes rested gravely upon the delicate blue-veined hands with their taper fingers and rosy nails.

“Come, my dears,” exclaimed Miss Rosebury, in her quick, chirpy way, “I’m sure you would like to come and take off your things after your hot, dusty drive. This way; and pray do go and wash your hands, Arthur.”

“Certainly, my dear Mary,” he replied, slowly. “If I had thought of it I would have done so before. I am very glad to see you at the Rectory, Miss Perowne. May I—”

He held out his earth-soiled hand to shake that of his visitor, but recollecting himself, he let it fall again, as he did the words he was about to speak.

“I do not mind,” said Helen, quickly, as she extended her own hand, which the curate had no other course than to take, and he did so with a slight colour mounting to his pale cheeks.

Grey Stuart offered her hand in turn, her darker glove showing no trace of the contact.

“I don’t like her,” said little Miss Rosebury to herself, and her lips tightened a little as she looked sidewise at Helen. “She’s a dreadfully handsome, wicked girl, I’m sure; and she tries to make every man fall in love with her that she sees. She’ll be trying Dr Bolter next.”

It was as if the sudden breath of a furnace had touched her cheeks as this thought crossed her mind, and she quite started as she took Grey Stuart’s arm, saying once more, as in an effort to change the current of her thoughts:

“Come, my dears; and do pray, Arthur, go and take off that dreadful coat!”

“Yes, my dear Mary, certainly,” he said; and smiling benignly at all in turn, he was moving towards the door, when Helen exclaimed quickly:

“I am not at all tired. I was going to ask Mr Rosebury to show me round his garden.”

There was a dead silence, only broken by the dull noise of the wheels of the pony=carriage rasping the gravel drive; there was the chirp of a sparrow too on the mossy roof-tiles, and then a fowl in the stable-yard clapped its wings loudly and uttered a triumphant crow, as, with old-fashioned chivalrous politeness, the Reverend Arthur took off his soft felt hat and offered his arm.

For it was like a revelation to him—an awakening from a quiet, dreamy, happy state of existence, into one full of excitement and life, as he saw that beautiful young creature standing before him with a sweet, appealing look in her eyes, and one of those soft white hands held appealingly forth, asking of him a favour.

And what a favour! She asked him to show her his garden—his pride—the place where he spent all his spare moments. His pale cheeks really did flush slightly now, and his soft, dull eyes brightened as if the reflection of Helen’s youth and beauty irradiated the thin face, the white forehead, and sparse grey hairs bared to the soft breeze.

Miss Mary Rosebury felt a bitter pang shoot through her tender little breast; and once more, as she saw Helen’s hand rest upon her brother’s shabby alpaca coat-sleeve, she compressed her lips, and felt that she hated this girl.

“She’s a temptress—a wicked coquette,” she thought.

It was a matter of moments only, and then she recollected herself.

Her first idea was to go round the garden with Helen; but she shrank from the act as being inquisitorial, and turning to Grey, she took her arm.

“Let them go and see the garden, my dear. You and I will go and get rid of the dust. There,” she continued, as she led her visitor into the little flower-bedecked drawing-room, “does it not strike nice and cool? Our rooms look very small after yours.”

“Oh! but so bright and cheerful,” said Grey, quietly.

“Now I’ll show you your bedroom,” said Miss Rosebury, whose feeling of annoyance was gone. “I’m obliged to put you both in the same room, and you must arrange between you who is to have the little bed. Now, welcome to the Rectory, my dear, and I hope you will enjoy your visit. Let me help you.”

For Grey had smiled her thanks, and was taking off her bonnet, the wire of which had somehow become entangled with her soft, fair, wavy hair.

Miss Rosebury's clever, plump little fingers deftly disentangled the bonnet, and then, not satisfied, began to smooth the slightly dishevelled hair, as if finding pleasure in playing with the fair, sunny strands that only seemed to ask for a dexterous turn or twist to naturally hang in clusters of curls.

Miss Rosebury's other hand must have been jealous, for it too rose to Grey's head and joined in the gentle caress; while far from looking tight, and forming a thin red line, the little middle-aged lady's lips were in smiling curves, and her eyes beamed very pleasantly at her young visitor, who seemed to be half pleased, half pained at the other's tender way.

"I am sure I shall be sorry to go away again," said Grey, softly. "It is very kind of you to fetch us here."

"Not at all, my dear," said Miss Rosebury, starting from her reverie; "but—but I'm afraid I must be very strict with you," she continued, in a half-merry, half-reproving tone. "The Misses Twettenham have confided you to my care, and I said—I said—"

"You said, Miss Rosebury?" exclaimed Grey, in wondering tones, and her large, soft eyes looked their surprise.

"Yes, I said, as we came away, I'm a very peculiar, particular old lady, my dear; and I can't have tall gentlemen making bows to you when you are in my charge."

"Oh, Miss Rosebury!" cried Grey, catching her hand and blushing scarlet, "please—pray don't think that! It was not to me!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the little lady, softly. "Hum! I see;" and she looked searchingly in the fair young face so near to hers. "It was my mistake, my dear; I beg your pardon."

Grey's face was all smiles, though her eyes were full of tears, and the next moment she was clasped tightly to Miss Rosebury's breast, responding to her motherly kisses, and saying eagerly:

"I could not bear for you to think that."

"And I ought never to have thought it, my dear," said the little lady, softly patting and smoothing Grey's hair. "Why, I ought to have known you a long time ago; and now I do know you, I hear you are going away?"

"Yes," said Grey, "and so very soon. My father wishes me to join him at the station."

"Yes, I know, my dear. It is quite right, for he is alone."

"And he says it is dull without me; but he wished me to thoroughly finish my education first."

"You don't recollect mamma, my dear, the doctor tells me?"

"No," said Grey, shaking her head. "She died when I was a very little child—the same year as Mrs Perowne."

"A sad position for two young girls," said Miss Rosebury.

"But the Misses Twettenham have always been so kind," said Grey, eagerly. "I shall be very, very sorry to go away?"

"And will Helen Perowne be very, very sorry to go away?"

Grey Stuart's face assumed a troubled expression, and she looked appealingly in her questioner's face, which immediately became all smiles.

"There, there, I fetched you both over to enjoy yourselves, and I'm pestering you with questions. Come into my room, my dear, while I wash my hands, and then we'll go and join the truants in the garden. I want you to like my brother very much, and I am sure he will like you."

"I know I shall," said Grey, quietly, but with a good deal of bright girlish ingenuousness in her tones. "Dr Bolter told me a great deal about him; how clever he is as a naturalist. I do like Dr Bolter."

Miss Rosebury glanced at her sharply. It was an involuntary glance, which changed directly into a beaming look of satisfaction, as they crossed the landing into Miss Rosebury's own room, where their conversation lengthened so that the "truants," as the little lady called them, were forgotten.

Volume One—Chapter Seven.

A Lesson in Botany.

Meanwhile the Reverend Arthur, with growing solicitude, was walking his garden as in a dream, explaining to his companion the progress of his flowers, his vegetables, and his fruit.

The beds were searched for strawberries that were not ready; the wall trees were looked at reproachfully for not bearing ripe fruit months before their time; and the roses, that should have been in perfection, were grieved over for

their fall during the week-past storm.

It was wonderful to him what sweet and earnest interest this fair young creature took in his pursuits, and how eagerly she listened to his discourse when, down by the beehives, he explained the habits of his bees, and removed screens to let her see the working insects within.

Miss Mary Rosebury took an interest in his garden and in his botanical pursuits, but nothing like this. She did not keep picking weeds and wild flowers from beneath the hedge, and listen with rapt attention while he pointed out the class, the qualities, and peculiarities of the plant.

Helen Perowne did, and it was quite a privilege to a weed to be picked, as was that stitchwort that had run its long trailing growth right up in the hedge, so as to give its pale green leaves and regular white cut-edged blossoms a good long bathe in the sunshine where the insects played.

"I have often seen these little white flowers in the hedges," she said softly. "I suppose they are too insignificant to have a name?"

She stooped and picked the flower as she spoke, looking in her companion's eyes for an answer.

"Insignificant? No!" he cried, warming to his task. "No flower is insignificant. The very smallest have beauties that perhaps we cannot see."

"Indeed," she said; and he looked at the blue veins beneath the transparent skin, as Helen held up the flower. "Then has this a name?"

"Yes," he said, rousing himself from a strange reverie, "a very simple, homely name—the stitchwort. Later on in the season you will find myriads of its smaller relative, the lesser stitchwort. They belong to the chickweed tribe."

"Not the chickweed with which I used to feed my dear little bird that died?"

"The very same," he replied, smiling. "Next time you pluck a bunch you will see that, though tiny, the flowers strangely resemble these."

"And the lesser stitchwort?"

"Yes?" he said, inquiringly. "Is it like this?"

"Nearly the same, only the flowers are half the size."

"And it grows where?"

"In similar places—by hedges and ditches."

"But you said something about time."

"Yes," replied the Reverend Arthur, who was thinking how wondrous pleasant it would be to go on teaching botany to such a pupil for evermore. "Yes, it is a couple of months, say, later than the great stitchwort."

"Ah!" said Helen, with a sigh. "By that time I shall be far away."

The stitchwort fell to the ground, and they walked on together, with Helen, Circe-like, transforming the meek, studious, elderly man by her side, so that he was ready to obey her slightest whim, eagerly trying the while to explain each object upon which her eye seemed to rest; while she, glorying in her new power, led him on and on, with soft word, and glance, and sigh.

They had been at least an hour in the garden when they reached the vinery, through whose open door came the sweet, inviting scent of the luxuriant tender growth.

"What place is this?" she cried.

"My vinery. May I show you in?"

"It would give you so much trouble."

"Trouble?" he said; and taking off his hat he drew back for her to enter.

"And will all those running things bear grapes?" she asked, as, throwing back her head and displaying the soft contour of her beautifully moulded throat, she gazed up at the tendril-handed vines.

"Yes," he said, dreamily, "these are the young bunches with berries scarcely set. You see they grow too fast. I have to break off large pieces to keep them back, and tie them to those wires overhead."

"Oh, do show me, Mr Rosebury?" she cried, with childlike eagerness.

"Yes," he said, smiling; "but I must climb up there."

"What, on to that board?"

"Yes, and tie them with this strong foreign grass."

"Oh, how interesting! How beautiful!" she cried, her red lips parted, and showing the little regular white teeth within. "I never thought that grapes would grow like this. Please show me more."

He climbed and sprawled awkwardly on to the great plank that reached from tie to tie, seating himself astride with the consequence that his trousers were dragged half way up his long, thin legs, revealing his clumsily-made garden shoes. In his eagerness to show his visitor the growing of his vines he heeded it not; but after snapping off a luxuriant shoot, he was about to tie the residue to a stout wire, when a cry of fear from Helen arrested him.

"Oh, Mr Rosebury, pray, pray get down!" she cried. "It is not safe. I'm sure you'll fall!"

"It is quite safe," he said, mildly; and he looked down with a bland smile at the anxious face below him.

"Oh, no," she cried; "it cannot be."

"I have tested it so many times," he said. "Pray do not be alarmed."

"But I am alarmed," she cried, looking up at him with an agitated air that made him hasten to descend, going through a series of evolutions that did not tend to set off his ungainly figure to advantage, and ended in landing him at her feet minus the bottom button of his vest.

"Thank you," she cried. "I am afraid I am very timid, but I could not bear to see you there."

"Then I must leave my vines for the present," he said, smiling.

"Oh, if you please," she cried; and then, as they left the vinery, she relapsed into so staid and dignified a mood, that the Reverend Arthur felt troubled and as if he had been guilty of some grave want of courtesy to his sister's guest, a state of inquietude that was ended by the coming of Miss Rosebury and Grey.

Volume One—Chapter Eight.

Helen's Discovery.

The nearness of the date for the long voyage to the East came like a surprise to the occupants of the Rectory and the Misses Twettenham's establishment. Dr Bolter had come down to stay at the Rectory for a few days, and somehow—no one could tell the manner of its happening—the few days, with occasional lapses for business matters, had grown into a few weeks, and still there seemed no likelihood of his leaving.

What was more, no one seemed to wish him to leave. He and the Reverend Arthur went out on botanical rambles, and came back loaded with specimens about which they discoursed all the evenings, while Miss Rosebury sat and worked.

Upon sundry occasions the young ladies from Miss Twettenham's came over to spend the day, when Grey would be treated by Miss Rosebury with affectionate solicitude, and Helen with a grave courtesy that never seemed to alter unless for the parties concerned to grow more distant.

With the Reverend Arthur, though, it was different. Upon the days of these visits he was changed. His outward appearance was the same, but there was a rapt, dreaminess pervading his actions and speech, and for the greater portion of the time he would be silent.

Not that this was observed, for the doctor chatted and said enough for all—telling stories, relating the experiences of himself and the curate in the woods, while Helen sat back in her chair proud and listless, her eyes half closed, and a languid look of *hauteur* in her handsome face. When addressed she would rouse herself for the moment, but sank back into her proud listlessness directly, looking bored, and as if she tolerated, because she could not help it, the jokes and sallies of the doctor.

The incident of the tall, fair young man was dead and buried. Whatever encouraging looks he may have had before, however his young love may have begun to sprout, it had been cut off by the untimely frost of Helen Perowne's indifference; for no matter how often he might waylay the school during walks, he never now received a glance from the dark beauty's eyes.

The unfortunate youth, after these meetings, would console himself with the thought that he could place himself opposite in church, and there dart appeal into her eyes; but the very first Sunday he went it was to find that Helen had changed her seat, so that it was her back and not her face at which he gazed.

A half-crown bestowed upon the pew-opener—young men at such times are generous—remedied this difficulty, and in the afternoon he had secured a seat opposite to Helen once again; but the next Sunday she had again changed her place, and no matter how he tried, Helen always avoided his gaze.

A month killed the tender passion, and the young gentleman disappeared from Mayleyfield for good—at least so it is to be hoped, for no ill was heard of the hapless youth, the first smitten down by Helen Perowne's dark eyes.

"And I am very glad we never see him now," said Helen one day when they were staying at the Rectory, and incidentally the troubles at Miss Twettenham's were named.

"So am I," said Grey, quietly. "It was such a pity that you should have noticed him at all."

"Nonsense! He was only a silly overgrown boy; but oh, Grey, child," cried Helen, in a burst of confidence, "isn't the Reverend Arthur delicious?"

"Delicious?" replied Grey, gazing at her wonderingly. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, nonsense! He is so droll-looking, so tall and thin, and so attentive. I declare I feel sometimes as if I could make everyone my slave."

"Oh! Helen, pray don't talk like that!" cried Grey, in alarm.

"Why not? Is a woman to be always wearing a pinafore and eating bread and butter? I'm not a child now. Look, there comes Dr Bolter along the lane. Stand back from the window, or he'll be blowing kisses at us, or some nonsense. I declare I hate that man!"

"I like Dr Bolter," said Grey, quietly.

"Yes, you like everyone who is weak and stupid. Dr Bolter always treats me as if I were a child. A silly, fat, dumpy little stupid; feeling my pulse and making me put out my tongue. He makes my fingers tingle to box his ears."

"I think Dr Bolter takes great interest in us," said Grey, slowly, and she stood gazing through the open window of their bedroom at the figure of the little doctor, as he came slowly down the lane, his eyes intent upon the weeds, and every now and then making a dart at some plant beneath the hedge, and evidently quite forgetful of his proximity to the Rectory gate.

"Interest, yes!" cried Helen, who, in the retirement of their bedroom threw off her languid ways, and seemed full of eagerness and animation. "A nice prospect for us, cooped up on board ship with a man like that! I declare I feel quite ashamed of him. I wonder what sort of people we shall have as cabin passengers."

"They are sure to be nice," said Grey.

"There will be some officers," continued Helen; "and some of them are sure to be young. I've heard of girls going out to India being engaged to be married directly. I say, Miss Demure, what fun it would be if we were to be engaged directly."

Grey Stuart looked at her old schoolfellow, half wondering at her flippancy, half in pain, but Helen went on, as if getting rid of so much vitality before having to resume her stiff, distant ways.

"Did you notice how silly the Reverend Arthur was last night?"

"No," replied Grey. "I thought he was very kind."

"I thought he was going down upon his knees to kiss my feet!" cried Helen, with a mocking laugh; and her eyes sparkled and the colour came brightly in her cheeks. "Oh, Grey, you little fair, soft, weak kitten of a thing, why don't you wake up and try to show your power."

"Nelly, you surprise me!" cried Grey. "How can you talk so giddily, so foolishly about such things."

"Because I am no longer a child," cried the girl, proudly, and she drew herself up and walked backwards and forwards across the room. "Do you suppose I do not know how handsome I am, and how people admire me? Well, I'm not going to be always kept down. Look at the long, weary years of misery we have had at that wretched school."

"Helen, you hurt me," said Grey. "Your words are cruel. No one could have been kinder to us than the Miss Twettenhams."

"Kinder—nonsense! Treated us like infants; but it is over now, and I mean to be free. Who is that on the gravel path? Oh! it's poor Miss Rosebury. What a funny, sharp little body she is!"

"Always so kind and genial to us," said Grey.

"To you. She likes you as much as she detests me."

"Oh, Nelly!"

"She does; but not more than I detest her. She would not have me here at all if she could help it."

"Oh! why do you say such things as that, Helen?"

"Because they are true. She does not like me because her brother is so attentive; and she seemed quite annoyed yesterday when the doctor spent so long feeling my pulse and talking his physic jargon to me. And—oh, Grey, hush! Come gently—here, beside this curtain! Don't let them see you! What a discovery! Let's go and fetch the Reverend Arthur to see as well."

"Oh, Helen, how wild you are! What do you mean?"

"That!" whispered Helen, catching her schoolfellow tightly by the arm as she wrenched her into position, so that she could look out of the little flower-decked window. "What do I mean? Why that! See there!"

"I am Forty-Four."

There was very little to see; and if Grey Stuart had accidentally seen what passed with unbiased eyes, she would merely have noted that, as Dr Bolter encountered Miss Rosebury at the gate, he shook hands warmly, paused for a moment, and then raised one of the lady's soft, plump little hands to his lips.

Grey would not have felt surprised. Why should she? The Reverend Arthur Rosebury was Dr Bolter's oldest and dearest friend, to whom the Roseburys were under great obligations; and there was nothing to Grey Stuart's eyes strange in this warm display of friendship.

Helen gave the bias to her thoughts as she laughingly exclaimed:

"Then the silly little woman was jealous of him yesterday. Oh, do look, Grey! Did you ever see anything so absurd! They are just like a pair of little round elderly doves. You see if the doctor does not propose."

"What nonsense, Helen!" cried Grey, reproachfully. "You are always talking and thinking of such things as that. Miss Rosebury and Dr Bolter are very old friends."

"That they are not. They never met till a few weeks ago; and perhaps, madam, the time may come when you will talk and think about such things as much as I."

Certainly there was little more to justify Helen Perowne's remark as the doctor and Miss Rosebury came along the garden path, unless the unusual flush in the lady's cheek was the effect of the heat of the sun.

But Helen Perowne was right, nevertheless, for a strange tumult was going on in little Miss Rosebury's breast.

She knew that Dr Bolter, although he had not said a word, was day by day becoming more and more impressive and almost tender in his way towards her.

He lowered his voice when he spoke, and was always so deeply concerned about her health, that more than once her heart had been guilty of so peculiar a flutter that she had been quite angry with herself; going to her own room, taking herself roundly to task, and asking whether, after living to beyond forty, she ought ever for a moment to dream of becoming different from what she was.

That very day, after feeling very much agitated by Dr Bolter's gravely-tender salute at the gate, she was completely taken by surprise.

For towards evening, when the Reverend Arthur had asked Helen if she would take a turn round the garden, and that young lady had risen with graceful dignity, and asked Grey to be their companion, Miss Rosebury and the doctor were left in the drawing-room alone.

The little lady's soul had risen in opposition to her brother's request to Helen, and she had been about to rise and say that she too would go, when she was quite disarmed by Helen herself asking Grey to accompany them, and she sank back in her seat with a satisfied sigh.

"I declare the wicked thing is trying to lead poor Arthur on; and he is so weak and foolish that he might be brought to make himself uncomfortable about her."

She sat thinking for a few moments as the girls left the room, and then settled herself in her chair with a sigh.

"It is all nonsense," she said to herself; "Arthur is like me—too old now ever to let such folly trouble his breast."

A loud snap made her start as Dr Bolter closed his cigar-case after spending some time in selecting a cigar, one which he had made up his mind to smoke in the garden.

Just then their eyes met, and the little lady rose, walked to her writing-table, took a brass box from a drawer, struck a match, and advanced with it in her fingers towards the doctor.

He replaced his cigar-case, and held out one hand for the match, took it, and blew it out before throwing it from the open window.

"Was it not a good one?" said Miss Rosebury, beginning to tremble.

"No," he said, quickly, as he thrust the cigar into his waistcoat pocket; "and I could not smoke here."

As he spoke he took the little lady's hand in his left and looked pleadingly in her face.

"Dr Bolter!" she exclaimed; and there was anger in her tone.

"Don't—don't," he exclaimed, huskily, and as if involuntarily his forefinger was pressed upon her wrist—"don't be agitated Miss Rosebury. Greatly accelerated pulse—almost feverish. Will you sit down?"

Trembling, and with her face scarlet, he led the little lady to the couch, where, snatching her hand away, she sank down, caught her handkerchief from her pocket, covered her face with it, and burst into tears.

"What have I done?" he cried. "Miss Rosebury—Miss Rosebury—I meant to say—I wished to speak—everything gone from me—half dumb—my dear Mary Rosebury—Mary—I love you with all my heart!"

As he spoke he plumped down upon his knees before her and tried to remove her hands from her face.

For a few moments she resisted, but at last she let them rest in his, and he seemed to gain courage and went on:

"It seemed so easy to tell you this; but I, who have seen death in every form, and been under fire a dozen times, feel now as weak as a girl. Mary, dear Mary, will you be my wife?"

"Oh, Dr Bolter, pray get up, it is impossible. You must be mad," she sobbed. "I must be mad to let you say it."

"No, no—no, no!" he cried. "If I am mad, though, let me stay so, for I never was so happy in my life."

"Pray—pray get up!" she cried, still sobbing bitterly; "it would look so foolish if you were seen kneeling to an old woman like me."

"Foolish! to be kneeling and imploring the most amiable, the dearest woman—the best sister in the world? Let them see me; let the whole world see me. I am proud to be here begging you—praying you to be my wife."

"Oh! no, no, no! It is all nonsense. Oh, Dr Bolter, I—I am forty-four!"

"Brave—courageous little woman," he cried, ecstatically, "to tell me out like that! Forty-four!"

"Turned," sobbed the little lady; "and I never thought now that anybody would talk to me like this."

"I don't care if you are fifty-four or sixty-four!" cried the little doctor excitedly. "I am not a youth, Mary. I'm fifty, my dear girl; and I've been so busy all my life, that, like our dear old Arthur, I have never even thought of such a thing as marriage. But since I have been over here—seen this quiet little home, made so happy by your clever hands—I have learned that, after all, I had a heart, and that if my dear old friend's sweet sister would look over my faults, my age, my uncouth ways, I should be the happiest of men."

"Pray—pray get up, doctor," said Miss Rosebury sadly.

"Call me Harry, and I will," he cried, gallantly.

"No, no!" she said, softly, and there was something so firm and gentle in her words that he rose at once, took the seat she pointed to by her side, and would have passed his arm round her shapely little waist, but she laid one hand upon his wrist and stayed him.

"No, Henry Bolter," she said, firmly; "we are not boy and girl. Let us act like sensible, mature, and thoughtful folk."

"My dear," he said, and the tears stood in his eyes, "I respect and love you more and more. What is there that I would not do?"

She beamed upon him sweetly, and laid her hand upon his as they sat there side by side in silence, enjoying a few brief moments of the greatest happiness that had ever been their lot, and then the little lady spoke:

"Henry," she said, softly, "my dear brother's dearest friend—my dearest friend—do not think me wanting in appreciation of what you have said."

"I could never think your words other than the best," he said, tenderly; and the little lady bowed her head before resuming.

"I will not be so foolish as to deny that in the past," she went on, "there have been weak times when I may have thought that it would be a happy thing for a man whom a woman could reverence and respect as well as love to come and ask me to be his wife."

"As I would always strive to make you respect me, Mary," he said, softly; and he kissed her hand.

"I know you would," she said, "but it cannot be."

"Mary," he cried, pleadingly, "I have waited and weighed all this, and asked myself whether it was vanity that made me think your dear eyes lighted up and that you were glad to see me when I came."

"You did not deceive yourself," she said, softly. "I was glad to see my dear brother's friend when he first came, and that gladness has gone on increasing until, I confess to you freely, it will come upon me like some great sadness when the time is here for you to go away."

"Say that again," he cried, eagerly.

"Why should I?" she said, sadly.

"Then—then you do love me, Mary?"

"I—I think so," she said, softly; and the little lady's voice was very grave; "but love in this world has often to give way to duty."

"Ye-es," he said, dubiously; "but where two people have been waiting such a precious long time before they found out what love really is, it seems rather hard to be told that duty must stand first."

"It is hard, but it is fact," she said.

"I don't know so much about that," said the little doctor. "Just now I feel as if it was my bounden duty to make you

my happy little wife.”

“And how can I think it my duty to accept you?” she said, smiling.

“Well, I do ask a great deal,” he replied. “It means going to the other side of the world; but, my dear Mary, you should never repent it.”

“I know I never should,” she replied. “We have only lately seen one another face to face, but I have known you and your kindness these many years.”

“Then why refuse me?”

“For one thing, I am too old,” she said, sadly.

“Your dear little heart is too young, and good, and tender, you mean.”

She shook her head.

“That’s no argument against it,” he said. “And now what else?”

“There is my brother,” she replied, speaking very firmly now.

“Your brother?”

“You know what dear Arthur is.”

“The simplest, and best, and truest of men.”

“Yes,” she cried, with animation.

“And a clever naturalist, whose worth has never yet been thoroughly known.”

“He is unworldly to a degree,” continued the little lady; “and as you justly say, the simplest of men.”

“I would not have him in the slightest degree different,” cried the doctor.

“I scold him a good deal sometimes,” said the little lady, smiling; “but I don’t think I would have him different in the least.”

“No; why should we?” said the doctor.

That *we* was a cunning stroke of diplomacy, and it made Miss Rosebury start. She shook her head though directly.

“No, Henry Bolter,” she said, firmly, “it cannot be.”

“Cannot be?” he said, despondently.

“No; I could not leave my brother. Let us join them in the garden!”

“I am not to take that for an answer?” cried the doctor.

“Yes,” she replied; “it would be cruel to leave him.”

“But Mary, dear Mary, you do not dislike me!” cried the little doctor. “I’m not much to look at I know; not a very gallant youth, my dear!”

“I think you are one of the best of men! You make me very proud to think that—that you could—could—”

“And you have owned to liking me, my dear?” he whispered. “Say *yea*. Arthur would soon get used to your absence; and of course, before long we should come back.”

“No,” she said firmly, “it could not be!”

“Not be!” he said in a tone of so much misery that little Miss Rosebury added:

“Not for me to go out there. We must wait.”

“Wait!”

“Yes; a few years soon pass away, and you will return.”

“But we—I mean—I am getting so precious old,” said the doctor dismally.

“Yes, we should be much older, Henry,” said the little lady sweetly, as she held out her hand; “but surely our esteem would never fade.”

“Never!” he cried, kissing her hand again; and then he laid that hand upon his arm, and they went out into the garden, where the little lady’s eyes soon made out the Reverend Arthur bending over his choicest flowers, to pick the finest blossoms for a bouquet ready for Helen Perowne to carelessly throw aside.

Satisfied that her brother was in no imminent danger with Grey Stuart present, little Miss Rosebury made no opposition to a walk round; the doctor thinking that perhaps, now the ice was broken, he might manage to prevail.

"How beautiful the garden is!" said the little lady, to turn the conversation.

"Beautiful, yes! but, my dear madam," exclaimed the doctor, in didactic tones, "a garden in Malaya, where I ask you to go—the jungle gorgeous with flowers—the silver river sparkling in the eternal sunshine—the green of the ever-verdant woods—the mountains lifting—"

"Thank you, doctor," said the little lady, "that is very pretty; but when I was a young girl they took me to see the 'Lady of Lyons,' and I remember that a certain mock prince describes his home to the lady something in that way—a palace lifting to eternal summer—and lo! as they say in the old classic stories, it was only a gardener's cottage after all!"

The matter-of-fact little body had got over her emotion, and this remark completely extinguished the doctor for the time.

Volume One—Chapter Ten.

Miss Rosebury Speaks Seriously.

The next day, when the visitors had been driven back by the Reverend Arthur, his sister met him upon the step, and taking his arm, led him down the garden to the vine-house.

"Let us go in here, Arthur," she said. "It is such a good place to talk in; there is no fear of being overheard."

"Yes, it is a quiet retired place," he said thoughtfully.

"I hope you were careful in driving, and had no accident, Arthur?"

"N-no; I had no accident, only I drove one wheel a little up the bank in Sandrock Lane."

"How was that? You surely did not try to pass another carriage in that narrow part?"

"N-no," hesitated the Reverend Arthur. "Let me see, how was it? Oh, I remember. Miss Perowne had made some remark to me, and I was thinking of my answer."

"And nearly upset them," cried Miss Rosebury. "Oh! Arthur—Arthur, you grow more rapt and dreamy every day; What is coming to you I want to know?"

The Reverend Arthur started guiltily, and gazed at his sister.

"Oh! Arthur," she cried, shaking a warning finger at him, "you are neglecting your garden and your natural history pursuits to try and make yourself a cavalier of dames, and it will not do. There—there, I won't scold you; but I am beginning to think that it will be a very good thing when our visitors have gone for good."

The Reverend Arthur sighed, and half turned away to snip off two or three tendrils from a vine-shoot above his head.

"I want to talk to you very seriously, Arthur," said the little lady, whose cheeks began to flush slightly with excitement; and she felt relieved as she saw her brother turn a little more away.

"I want to talk to you very seriously indeed," said Miss Rosebury.

"I am listening," he said hoarsely; but she did not notice it in her excitement.

There was a minute's pause, during which the Rev. Arthur broke off the young vine-shoot by accident, and then stood trying to replace it again.

At last Miss Rosebury spoke.

"Arthur," she said—and her brother started and seemed to shiver, though she saw it not—"Arthur, Henry Bolter has asked me to be his wife!"

The Reverend Arthur turned round now in his astonishment, with his face deadly white and the tiny beads of perspiration upon his forehead. "Asked you to be his wife?" he said. "Yes, dear."

"I am astonished," cried the Reverend Arthur. "No, I am not," he added thoughtfully. "He seemed to like you very much, Mary."

"And I like him very much, Arthur, for I think him a truly good, amiable, earnest man."

"He is my dear Mary—he is indeed; but—but—"

"But what, Arthur? Were you going to say that you could not spare me?"

"I—I hardly know what I was about to say, Mary, you took me so by surprise. It would be very strange, though, to be here without you."

"And you will not be, Arthur. I felt that I must tell you. I have nothing that I keep from you; but I have refused him."

"You have refused him," he said thoughtfully. "Yes, I felt that it would not be right to let a comparative stranger come in here and break up at once our happy little home. No, Arthur, this must all be like some dream. You and I, dear brother, are fast growing into elderly people; and love such as that is the luxury of the young."

"Love such as that," said the Reverend Arthur, softly, "is the luxury of the young!"

"Yes, dear brother, it would be folly in me to give way to such feelings!"

"Do you like Harry?" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"Yes," she said, quietly. "I have felt day by day, Arthur, that I liked him more and more. It was and is a wonder to me at my age; but I should not be honest if I did not own that I liked him."

"It is very strange, Mary," said the curate, softly.

"Yes, it is very strange," she said; "and as I think of it all, I am obliged to own to myself, that after all I should have liked to be married. It is such a revival of the past."

The curate nodded his head several times as he let himself sink down upon the greenhouse steps, resting his hands upon his knees.

"But it is all past now, Arthur," said the lady, quickly, and the tears were in her eyes, "we are both too old, my dear brother; and as soon as these visitors are gone, we will forget all disturbing influences, and go back to our happy old humdrum life."

She could not trust herself to say more, but hurried off to her room, leaving the Reverend Arthur gazing fixedly at the red-brick floor.

"We are too old," he muttered softly, from time to time; and as he said those words there seemed to stand before him the tall, well-developed figure of a dark-eyed, beauteous woman, who was gazing at him softly from between her half-closed, heavily-fringed lids.

"We are too old," he said again; and then he went on dreaming of that day's drive, and Helen's gentle farewell—of the walks they had had in his garden—the flowers she had taken from his hand. Lastly, of his sister's words respecting disturbing influences, and then settling down to their own happy humdrum life once again.

"It is fate!" he said, at last—"fate. Can we bring back the past?"

He felt that he could not, even as his sister felt just then, as she knelt beside one of the chairs in her own sweet-scented room, and asked for strength, as she termed it, to fight against this temptation.

"No," she cried, at last; "I cannot—I will not! For Arthur's sake I will be firm."

Volume One—Chapter Eleven.

A Difficulty Solved.

A week passed, during which all had been very quiet at the Rectory, brother and sister meeting each other hour by hour in a kind of saddened calm. The Reverend Arthur was paler than usual, almost cadaverous, while there was a troubled, anxious look in little Miss Rosebury's eyes, and a sharpness in her voice that was not there on the day when Dr Bolter proposed.

No news had been heard of the young ladies at Miss Twettenham's; and Dr Bolter, to Miss Rosebury's sorrow, had not written to her brother.

But she bravely fought down her suffering, busying herself with more than usual zeal in home and parish; while the Reverend Arthur came back evening after evening faint, weary, and haggard, from some long botanical ramble.

The eighth day had arrived, and towards noon little Miss Rosebury was quietly seated by the open window with her work, fallen upon her knee, and a sad expression in her eyes as she gazed wistfully along the road, thinking, truth to tell, that Dr Bolter might perhaps come in to their early dinner.

Doctors were so seldom ill, or perhaps he might be lying suffering at some hotel.

The thought sent a pang through the little body, making her start, and seizing her needle, begin to work, when a warm flush came into her cheeks as she heard at one and the same time the noise of wheels, and a slow, heavy step upon the gravel.

The step she well knew, and for a few moments she did not look up; but when she did she uttered an exclamation.

"Tut—tut—tut!" she said. "If anyone saw poor Arthur now they would think him mad."

Certainly the long, gaunt figure of the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, in his soft, shapeless felt hat, and long, clinging, shabby black alpaca coat, was very suggestive of his being a kind of male Ophelia gone slightly distraught as the consequence of a disappointment in love.

For in the heat of a long walk the tie of his white cravat had gone round towards the nape of his neck, while his felt hat was decorated to the crown with butterflies secured to it by pins. The band had wild flowers and herbs tucked in here and there. His umbrella—a very shabby, baggy gingham—was closed and stuffed with botanical treasures; and his vasculum, slung beneath one arm, was so gorged with herbs and flowers of the field that it would not close.

He was coming slowly down the path as wheels stopped at the gate just out of sight from the window, where little Miss Rosebury sat with her head once more bent down over her work; but she could hear a quick, well-known voice speaking to the driver of the station fly; then there was the click of the latch as the gate swung to, and the little lady's heart began to go pat, pat—pat, pat—much faster than the quick, decided step that she heard coming down the long gravel path.

Her hearing seemed to be abnormally quickened, and she listened to the wheels as the fly drove off, and then heard every word as the doctor's quick, decided voice saluted his old friend.

"Been horribly busy, Arthur," he cried; "but I'm down at last. Where's Mary?"

Hiding behind the curtain, for she had drawn back to place her hand upon her side to try and control the agitated beating of her foolish little heart.

"Oh, it is dreadful! How can I be so weak?" she cried angrily, as she made a brave effort to be calm—a calmness swept away by the entrance of the doctor, who rushed in boisterously to seize her hands, and before she could repel him, he had kissed her heartily.

"Eureka! my dear Mary! Eureka!" he cried. "I have it—I have it!"

"Henry—Dr Bolter!" she cried, with a decidedly dignified look in her pleasant face.

"Don't be angry with me, my dear," he cried; "the news is so good. You couldn't leave poor Arthur, could you?"

"No!" she cried, with an angry little stamp, as she mentally upbraided him for tearing open the throbbing wound she was striving to heal. "You know I will not leave him."

"I love and honour you for it more and more, my dear," he cried. "But what do you think of this? Suppose we take him with us?"

"Take him with us?" said the little lady, slowly.

"Yes," cried the doctor, excitedly; "take him with us, Mary—my darling wife that is to be. The chaplaincy of our settlement is vacant. Did you ever hear the like?"

Little Miss Rosebury could only stare at the excited doctor in a troubled way, for she understood him now, though her lips refused to speak.

"Yes, and I am one of the first to learn the news. I can work it, I feel sure, if he'll come. Then only think; lovely climate, glorious botanical collecting trips for him! The land, too, whence Solomon's ships brought gold, and apes, and peacocks. Ophir, Mary, Ophir! Arthur will be delighted."

"Indeed!" said that lady wonderingly.

"Not a doubt about it, my dear. My own discovery. All live together! Happiness itself."

"But Arthur is delicate," she faltered. "The station is unhealthy."

"Am not I there? Do I not understand your brother thoroughly? Oh! my dear Mary, do not raise obstacles in the way. It is fate. I know it is, in the shape of our Political Resident Harley. He came over with me, and goes back in the same boat. He has had telegrams from the station."

"You—you take away my breath, doctor," panted the little lady. "I must have time to think. Oh! no, no, no; it is impossible. Arthur would never consent to go."

"If you will promise to be my wife, Mary, I'll make him go!" cried the doctor, excitedly.

"No, no; he never would. He could not give up his position here, and I should not allow him. It would be too cruelly selfish on my part. It is impossible; it can never be."

The next moment the doctor was alone, for Miss Rosebury had hurried out to go and sob passionately as a girl in her own room, waking up more and more, as she did, to the fact that she had taken the love distemper late in life; but it was none the weaker for being long delayed.

"It isn't impossible, my dear," chuckled the doctor, as he rubbed his hands; "and if I know anything of womankind, the darling little body's mine. I hope she won't think I want her bit of money, because I don't."

He took a turn up and down the room, rubbing his hands and smiling in a very satisfied way.

"I think I can work Master Arthur," he said. "He'll be delighted at the picture I shall paint him of our flora and fauna. It will be a treat for him, and we shall be as jolly as can be. We'll see about duty and that sort of thing. Why, it will be a better post for him ever so much, and he's a splendid old fellow."

There was another promenade of the room, greatly to the endangerment of Miss Rosebury's ornaments. Then the

doctor slapped one of his legs loudly.

“Capital!” he cried. “What a grand thought. What a card to play! That will carry her by storm. I’ll play that card at our next interview; but gently, Bolter, my boy, don’t be in too great a hurry! She’s a splendid specimen, and you must not lose her by being precipitate; but, by Jove! what a capital thought—tell her it will be quite an act of duty to come with me and act a mother’s part to those two girls.”

“She’ll do it—she’ll do it,” he cried, after a pause, “for she quite loves little Grey, and a very nice little girl too. Then it will keep that dark beauty out of mischief, for hang me if I think I could get her over to her father disengaged, and so I told Harley yesterday.”

The doctor did knock off an ornament from a stand at his next turn up and down the room, breaking it right in two; and this brought him to his senses, as, full of repentance, he sought the Reverend Arthur Rosebury in his study to act as medium and confess his sin.

Volume One—Chapter Twelve.

Playing the Card.

The Reverend Arthur had removed the butterflies and wild flowers from his hat by the time Dr Bolter reached him, and was walking slowly up and down the study with his hands clasped behind him.

There was a wrinkled look of trouble in his face.

As the doctor entered he smilingly placed a chair for his friend, and seemed to make an effort to get rid of the feeling of oppression that weighed him down.

Then they sat and talked of butterflies and birds for a time, fencing as it were, for somehow Dr Bolter felt nervous and ill at ease, shrinking from the task which he had set himself, while the Reverend Arthur, though burning to ask several questions upon a subject nearest his heart, shrank from so doing lest he should expose his wound to his friend’s inquisitorial eyes.

“I declare I’m as weak as a child,” said the doctor to himself, after making several vain attempts at beginning. “It’s dreadfully difficult work!” and he asked his friend if the lesser copper butterfly was plentiful in that district.

“No,” said the Reverend Arthur, “we have not chalk enough near the surface.”

Then there was a pause—a painful pause—during which the two old friends seemed to be fighting hard to break the ice that kept forming between them.

“I declare I’m much weaker than a child,” said the doctor to himself; and the subject was the next moment introduced by the Reverend Arthur, who, with a guilty aspect and look askant, both misinterpreted by the doctor, said, hesitatingly:

“Do you know for certain when you go away, Harry?”

“In three weeks, my boy, or a month at most, and there is no time to lose in foolish hesitation, is there?”

“No, of course not. You mean about the subject Mary named?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” cried the doctor, who was now very hot and excited. “You wouldn’t raise any objection, Arthur?”

“No, I think not, Harry. It would be a terrible loss to me.”

“It would—it would.”

“And I should feel it bitterly at first.”

“Of course—of course,” said the doctor, trying to speak; but his friend went on excitedly.

“Time back I could not have understood it; but I am not surprised now!”

“That’s right, my dear Arthur, that’s right; and I will try and make her a good husband.”

“She is a very, very good woman, Harry!”

“The best of women, Arthur, the very best of women; and it will be so nice for those two girls to have her for guide.”

“Do—do they go—both go—with you—so soon?” said the Reverend Arthur, wiping his wet forehead and averting his head.

“Yes, of course,” said the doctor, eagerly.

“And—and does Mary say she will accept you, Harry?”

“No,” said a quick, decided voice. “I told him I could not leave you, Arthur;” and the two gentlemen started guiltily

from their chairs.

"My dear Mary," said the curate, "how you startled me."

"I have not had time to tell him yet," said the doctor, recovering himself; and taking the little lady's hand, he led her to the chair he had vacated, closed the door, and then stood between brother and sister. "I have not had time to tell him yet, my dear Miss Rosebury, but I have been saying to him that it would be so satisfactory for you to help me in my charge of those two young ladies."

Miss Rosebury started in turn, and coloured slightly.

"And now, my dear old friend," said the doctor, "let me ask you, treating you as Mary's nearest relative, will you give your consent to our marriage?"

"No, Arthur, you cannot," said the little lady, firmly. "I could not leave you."

"But I have an offer to make you, my dear old friend," said the doctor; "the chaplaincy at our station is vacant; will you come out with us and take it? There will be no separation then, and—"

He stopped short, for at his words the Reverend Arthur seemed to be galvanised into a new life. He started from his seat, the listless, saddened aspect dropped away, his eyes flashed, and the blood mounted to his cheeks.

"Come with you?" he cried. "Chaplaincy? Out there?"

It seemed as if he had been blinded by the prospect, for the next moment he covered his face with his hands, and sank back in his seat without a word.

"I knew it!" cried little Miss Rosebury, in reproachful tones; and, leaving her chair, she clung to her brother's arm. "I told you he could not break up his old home here. No, no, Arthur, dear Arthur, it is all a foolish dream! I do not wish to leave you—I could not leave you. Henry Bolter, pray—pray go," she said, piteously, as she turned to the doctor. "We both love you dearly as our truest friend; but you place upon us burdens that we cannot bear. Oh, why—why did you come to thus disturb our peace? Arthur, dear brother, I will not go away!"

"Hush! hush, Mary!" the curate said, from behind his hands. "Let me think. You do not know. I cannot bear it yet!"

"My dear old Arthur," began the doctor.

"Let me think, Harry, let me think," he said, softly.

"No, no, don't think!" cried the little lady, almost angrily. "You shall not sacrifice yourself for my sake! I will not be the means of dragging you from your peaceful happy home—the home you love—and from the people who love you for your gentle ways! Henry Bolter, am I to think you cruel and selfish instead of our kind old friend?"

"No, no, my dear Mary!" cried the doctor, excitedly. "Selfish? Well, perhaps I am, but—"

"Hush!" said the curate softly; and again, "let me think."

A silence fell upon the little group, and the chirping of the birds in the pleasant country garden was all that broke that silence for many minutes to come.

Then the Reverend Arthur rose from his seat and moved towards the door, motioning to them not to follow him as he went out into the garden, and they saw him from the window go up and down the walks, as if communing with all his familiar friends, asking, as it were, their counsel in his time of trial.

At last he came slowly back into the room, where the elderly lovers had been seated in silence, neither daring to break the spell that was upon them, feeling as they did how their future depended upon the brother's words.

They looked at him wonderingly as he came into the room pale and agitated, as if suffering from the reaction of a mental struggle; but there was a smile of great sweetness upon his lips as he said, softly:

"Harry, old friend, I never had a brother. You will be really brother to me now."

"No, no!" cried his sister, excitedly. "You shall not sacrifice yourself like this!"

"Hush, dear Mary," he replied calmly; "let me disabuse your mind. You confessed to me your love for Harry Bolter here. Why should I stand in the way of your happiness?"

"Because it would half kill you to be left alone."

"But I shall not be left alone," he cried, excitedly. "I shall bitterly regret parting from this dear old home; but I am not so old that I could not make another in a foreign land."

"Oh! Henry Bolter," protested the little lady, "it must not be!"

"But it must," said her brother, taking her in his arms, and kissing her tenderly. "There are other reasons, Mary, why I should like to go. I need not explain what those reasons are; but I tell you honestly that I should like to see this distant land."

"Where natural history runs mad, Arthur," cried the doctor, excitedly. "Hurrah!"

"Oh, Arthur!" cried his sister, "you cannot mean it. It is to please me."

"And myself," he said, quietly. "There; I am in sober earnest, and I tell you that no greater pleasure could be mine than to see you two one."

"At the cost of your misery, Arthur."

"To the giving of endless pleasure to your husband and my brother," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling; and before she could thoroughly realise the fact, little quiet Miss Mary Rosebury was sobbing on the doctor's breast.

Volume One—Chapter Thirteen.

On the Voyage.

In these busy days of rail and steam, supplemented by their quick young brother electricity, time seems to go so fast that before the parties to this story had thoroughly realised the fact, another month had slipped by, another week had been added to that month, the Channel had been crossed, then France by train, and at Marseilles the travellers had stepped on board one of the steamers of the French company, the *Messageries Maritimes*, bound for Alexandria, Aden, Colombo, Penang, and then, on her onward voyage to Singapore and Hong Kong, to drop a certain group of her passengers at the mouth of the Darak river, up which they would be conveyed by Government steamer to Sindang, the settlement where Mr Harley, her Britannic Majesty's Resident at the barbaric court of the petty Malay Rajah-Sultan Murad had the guidance of affairs.

It was one of those delicious, calm evenings of the South, with the purple waters of the tideless Mediterranean being rapidly turned into orange and gold. Away on the left could be seen, faintly pencilled against the sky, the distant outlines of the mountains that shelter the Riviera from the northern winds. To the right all was gold, and purple, and orange sea; and the group seated about the deck enjoying the comparative coolness of the evening knew that long before daybreak the next morning they would be out of sight of land.

There were a large number of passengers; for the most part English officials and their families returning from leave of absence to the various stations in the far East; and as they were grouped about the spacious quarter-deck of the sumptuously-fitted steamer rapidly ploughing its way through the sun-dyed waters, the scene was as bright and animated as painter could depict.

Gentlemen were lounging, smoking, or making attempts to catch the fish that played about the vessel's sides without the slightest success; ladies were seated here and there, or promenading the deck, while other groups were conversing in low tones as they drank in the soft, sensuous air, and wondered how people could be satisfied to exist in dull and foggy, sunless England, when nature offered such climes as this.

"In another half-hour, Miss Perowne, I think I shall be able to show you a gorgeous sunset, if you will stay on deck."

The speaker was a tall, fair man by rights, but long residence in the East had burned his skin almost to the complexion of that of a Red Indian. He was apparently about forty, with high forehead, clear-cut aquiline features, and the quick, firm, searching look of one accustomed to command and master men.

He took off his puggree-covered straw hat as he spoke, to let the cool breeze play through his hair, which was crisp and short, but growing so thin and sparse upon the top that partings were already made by time, and he would have been looked upon by every West-end hair-dresser as a suitable object to be supplied with nostrums and capillary regenerators galore.

"Are the sunsets here very fine?" said Helen, languidly, as she lay back in a cane chair listlessly gazing through her half-closed eyes at the glittering water that foamed astern, ever widening away from the churning of the huge propeller of the ship.

"Very grand some of them, but nothing to those we shall show you in the water-charged atmosphere close to the equator. Ah, Miss Stuart, come here and stop to see the sunset. You grieve me, my child," he added, smiling, and showing his white teeth.

"Grieve you, Mr Harley, why?" said Grey, smiling.

"Because I feel as if I were partner in the crime of taking you out to Sindang to turn that fair complexion of yours brown."

"Grey Stuart is very careless about such things," said Helen, with languid pettishness. "How insufferably hot it is!"

"Well," said Mr Harley, laughing, "you are almost queen here already, Miss Perowne; everyone seems to constitute himself your slave. Shall we arm ourselves with punkahs, and waft sweet southern gales to your fair cheeks?"

"Here! Hi, Harley!" cried the brisk voice of Dr Bolter from the forward part of the vessel.

"'Tis the voice of the male turtle-dove," said Mr Harley, laughing. "He is separated from his mate. Have I your permission to go, fair queen?"

Helen's eyes opened widely for a moment, and she darted an angry look at the speaker before turning away with an imperious gesture, when, with a meaning smile upon his lip, Neil Harley, Her Britannic Majesty's Political Resident at Sindang, walked forward.

"That man irritates me," said Helen, in a low, angry voice. "I began by disliking him; I declare I hate him now!"

"Is it not because you both try to say sharp-edged words to each other, Helen?" said Grey Stuart, seating herself by her schoolfellow's side, and beginning to work. "Mr Harley is always very kind and nice to me."

"Pah! He treats you like a child!" said Helen, contemptuously.

"Well," said Grey, smiling in her companion's face, "I suppose I am a child to him. Here comes Mr Rosebury."

"I wish Mr Rosebury were back in England," said Helen, petulantly. "He wearies me with his constant talk about the beauties of nature. I wish this dreadful voyage were over!"

"And we have hardly begun it, Helen," said Grey, quietly; but noticing that her companion's face was flushed, she said, anxiously, "Are you unwell, dear?"

"Unwell? No."

There was something strange in Helen's behaviour, but she had the skill to conceal it, as the newly-appointed chaplain of Sindang came slowly up and began to talk to Helen in his dry, measured way, trying to draw her attention to the beauty of the evening, but without avail, for she seemed *distracte*, and her answers were sometimes far from pertinent to the subject in question.

Just then Mrs Doctor Bolter came bustling up, looking bright, eager, and full of animation.

She darted an uneasy look at her brother, and another at Helen, which was returned by one full of indifference, almost defiance, as if resenting the little lady's way, and Mrs Bolter turned to Grey Stuart.

"Where is my husband, my dear?" she said. "I declare this ship is so big that people are all getting lost! Oh! here he comes! Now there—just as if there were no sailors to do it—he must be carrying pails of water!"

For the little doctor came panting along with a bucket of water in each hand, the Resident walking by his side till the two vessels were plumped down in front of Helen's chair.

"Now, my dear Harry, what are you doing?" began the little lady, in tones of remonstrance.

"All right, my dear. Two pails full of freshly-dipped sea water. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will close round, I will show you some of the marvels of creation."

As quite a little crowd began to collect, many being ladies, at whom the little doctor's wife—only a few days back elderly Miss Rosebury—directed very sharp, searching glances, especially when they spoke to her husband, Helen rose with a look of annoyance from her chair and began to walk forward.

She was hesitating about going farther alone, when a low voice by her ear said, softly:

"Thank you, Miss Perowne. Suppose you take my arm? We will walk forward into the bows."

"Mr Harley!" said the lady, drawing back, with her eyes full of indignation.

"I think I was to show you the beauty of the sunset," he said. "We can see it so much better from the bows, and," he added, meaningly, "I shall have so much better an opportunity to say that which I wish to say."

"What you wish to say, Mr Harley?"

"Yes," he replied, taking her hand, drawing it quickly through his arm, and leading her down the steps.

"I wish to return, Mr Harley," she said, imperiously.

"You shall return, my dear young lady, when I have said that which I wish to say."

"What can you wish to say to me?" she said, haughtily.

"That which your eyes have been asking me if I could say, ever since we met a fortnight ago, Helen, and that which I have determined to say while there is time."

Helen Perowne shrank away, but there was a power of will in her companion that seemed to subdue her, and in spite of herself she was led to the forward part of the vessel, just as the sun had dipped below the horizon; the heavens were lit up like the sea with a gorgeous blaze of orange, purple, green, and gold; and little Mrs Doctor Bolter exclaimed:

"That wicked, coquettish girl away again! Grey Stuart, my dear, where has your schoolfellow gone?"

Volume One—Chapter Fourteen.

A Troublesome Charge.

Neil Harley, in spite of his strong power of will, had said but very few words to Helen Perowne before little Mrs Doctor Bolter bustled up.

"Oh, Mr Harley!" she exclaimed, "you have carried off my charge."

"Yes," he replied, smiling pleasantly; "we came forward to have a good view of the sunset."

"Because you could see it so much better at the other end?" said Mrs Bolter, drily.

"No; but because we could see it uninterruptedly," replied the Resident, coolly.

"Oh no, you could not, Mr Harley," continued the little lady, "because you see I have come to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*. Helen, my dear, will you come back and join us on the other deck?"

"To be sure she will, my dear Mrs Bolter, and I shall come too. There, mind those ropes. That's better. What a glorious evening! I hope I am to have the pleasure of showing you ladies many that are far more beautiful on the Darak river."

Little Mrs Bolter looked up at him meaningly; but the Resident's eyes did not flinch; he only gave her a quiet nod in reply, and they climbed once more to the quarter-deck, where, in preparation for the coming darkness, the sailors were busily hanging lamps.

They had no sooner reached the group of people around Dr Bolter, than, as if to revenge herself for the annoyance to which she had been subjected, Helen disengaged her hand, walked quickly up to the Reverend Arthur, and began to talk to him in a low earnest voice.

"If she would only keep away from poor Arthur," muttered the little lady, "I would not care—she is making him infatuated. And now there's Henry talking to that thin dark lady again. I wish he would not talk so much to her."

"Married late in life," said the Resident, quietly, as he lit a cigar; "but she seems to have her share of jealousy. She's a dear, good little woman, though, all the same."

He walked to the side watching Helen where she stood beneath one of the newly lit lamps, looking very attractive in the faint reflected rays of the sunset mingled with those shed down from above upon her glossy hair.

"Why does she go so much to gossip with that chaplain? If it is to pique me it is labour in vain, for I have not a *soupeçon* of jealousy in my composition. She is very beautiful and she knows it too. What a head and neck, and what speaking eyes!"

He stood smoking for a few minutes and then went on:

"Speaking eyes? Yes, they are indeed. It is no fancy, but it seems to have been to lead me on; and as I judge her, perhaps wrongfully, she loves to drag every man she sees in her train. Well, she has made a mistake this time if she thinks she is going to play with me. I feel ashamed of myself sometimes when I think of how easily I let her noose me, but it is done."

He lit a fresh cigar, and still stood watching Helen.

"Sometimes," he continued, "I have called myself idiot for this sudden awakening of a passion that I thought dead; but no, the man who receives encouragement from a woman like that is no idiot. It is the natural consequence that he should love her."

Just then three or four of the passengers, officers and civil officials, sauntered up to Helen, and after the first few words she joined with animation in the conversation; but not without darting a quick glance once or twice in the Resident's direction.

"No," he said, softly; "the man who, receiving encouragement, becomes deeply in love with you, fair Helen, is no idiot, but very appreciative, for you are a beautiful girl and very fond of admiration."

He did not move, but still watched the girl, who began to stand out clearly against the lamp-light now, more attractive than he had ever seen her.

"Yes," he said; "you may flirt and coquet to your heart's content, but it will have no effect upon me, my child. I don't think I am a conceited man, but I know I am strong, and have a will. Let me see, I have known you since I went down, at Bolter's request, to be his best man at the wedding, and I had you, my fair bridesmaid, under my charge, with the result that you tried to drag me at your car. Well, I am caught, but take care, my child, prisoners are dangerous sometimes, and rise and take the captor captive."

"Yes," he continued, "some day I may hold you struggling against my prisoning hands—hands that grasp you tenderly, so that your soft plumage may not be ruffled, for it is too beautiful to spoil."

Just then there was a sally made by a French officer of the vessel, and Helen's silvery laugh rang out.

"Yes, your laugh is sweet and thrilling," he continued softly. "No doubt it was a brilliant compliment our French friend paid. I don't think I am vain, if I say to myself even that laugh was uttered to pique me. It is an arrow that has failed, for I am in a prophetic mood. I have seen the maidens of every land almost beneath the sun, and allowing for savagery, I find them very much the same when they turn coquettes. You could not understand my meaning this evening, eh? Well, we shall see. Go on, coquette, and laugh and dance in the sun till you are tired. I'll wait till then. The effervescence and froth of the cup will have passed away, and there will be but the sweet, clear wine of your woman's nature left for me to drink. I'll wait till then."

Again Helen's laugh rang out, but the Resident remained unmoved.

"Am I a coxcomb—a conceited idiot?" he said; then softly, "I hope not. Time will prove."

"I don't care, Harry; I will not have it!"

"But it is only girlish nonsense, my dear."

"Then the young ladies in our charge shall not indulge in girlish nonsense. It is not becoming. Grey Stuart never gets a cluster of young men round her like a queen in a court."

"More fools the young men, my dear," said the doctor; "for Grey is really as sweet a maiden as—"

"Henry!"

"Well, really, my dear, I mean it. Hang it, my dear Mary! don't think I mean anything but fatherly feeling towards the child. Hallo, Harley! you there? Why are you not paying your court yonder?"

"Because, my dear Bolter, your good lady here has given me one severe castigation to-day for the very sin."

"There I think you are wrong, Mary," said the doctor, quickly; "and I will say that I wish you, a stable, middle-aged man, and an old friend of her father's, would go and spend more time by her side; it would keep off these buzzing young gnats."

"If I said anything unkind, Mr Harley," said the little lady, holding out her hand, "please forgive me. I only wish to help my husband to do his duty towards the young lady who is in our charge."

"My dear Mrs Bolter," said the Resident, taking the extended hand, "I only esteem my dear old friend's wife the more for the brave way in which she behaved. I am sure we shall be the firmest of friends!"

"I hope we shall, I am sure," said the little lady, warmly.

"What do you say, Bolter?"

"I know you will," cried the doctor. "You won't be able to help it, Harley. She is just the brave, true lady we want at the station to take the lead and rule the roost. She'll keep all the ladies in order."

"Now, Henry!"

"But you will, my dear; and I tell you at once that Neil Harley here will help you all he can."

Five minutes later the doctor and his wife were alone, the former being called to account for his very warm advocacy of Mr Harley.

"Well, my dear, he deserves it all," said the doctor.

"But I don't quite like his behaviour towards Helen Perowne," said the little lady; "and now we are upon the subject, Harry, I must say that I don't quite like your conduct towards that girl."

The doctor turned, took her hands, held them, and laughed.

"Why, what a droll little body you are, Mary!"

"And why, sir, pray?" said the lady, rather sharply.

"Four or five months ago, my dear, I don't believe you knew the real meaning of the word *love*, and now I honestly believe you are finding out the meaning of the word *jealousy* as well; but seriously, my dear, that girl makes me shiver!"

"Shiver, sir! Why?"

"She's a regular firebrand coming amongst our young men. She'll do no end of mischief. I see it as plain as can be, and I shall have to set to as soon as I get home to compound a fresh medicine—pills at night, draught in the morning—for the cure of love-sickness. She'll give the lot the complaint. But, you dear, silly little old woman, you don't think that I—oh!—oh! come, Mary, Mary, my dear!"

"Well, there, I don't think so, Harry," said the little lady, apologetically, "but she is so horribly handsome, and makes such use of those dreadful eyes of hers, that it makes me cross when I see the gentlemen obeying her lightest beck and call."

"Well, she does lead them about pretty well," chuckled the doctor. "She's a handsome girl!"

"Henry!"

"Well, my dear, I'll think she's as ugly as sin if you like."

"And in spite of all you say of Mr Harley, I don't think he is behaving well. She gave him a few of those looks of hers when he came down to our wedding, and he has been following her ever since. I've watched him!"

"What a wicked wretch!" chuckled the little doctor. "Has he taken a fancy to a pretty girl, then, and made up his mind to win? Why, he's as bad as that scoundrel Harry Bolter, who wouldn't take *no* for an answer, and did not."

"Now, don't talk nonsense, Henry. This is too serious a subject for joking."

"I am as serious as a judge, Polly."

"What!"

"Is there anything the matter, my dear?" said the little doctor, who was startled by the lady's energy.

"What did you call me, sir?"

"Polly, my dear; tender pet name for Mary."

"Never again please, dear Henry," said the little lady. "I don't wish to be too particular, and don't mind tenderness—I—rather like it, dear. But do I look like a lady who could be called Polly?"

"Then it shall always be Mary, my dear," said the doctor; "and I won't joke about serious matters. As to Neil Harley and Helen Perowne, you're quite right; but 'pon my word, I don't see why we should interfere as long as matters don't go too far."

"I do not agree with you, Henry."

"You have not heard my argument, my dear," he said taking her hand, drawing it through his arm, and walking her up and down the deck. "Now look here, my dear Mary, six months ago you were a miserable unbeliever."

"A what?" cried the lady, indignantly.

"A miserable unbeliever. You had no faith in its being the duty of all ladies to get married; and I came to your barbarous little village and converted you."

"Oh, yes, I had great belief," said the little lady, quietly.

"Well, then, you were waiting for the missionary to come and lead your belief the right way. Now then, my dear, don't you see this? Suppose a place where there are a dozen ladies and only one gentleman. How many can be married?"

"Why, only one lady, of course," said Mrs Doctor.

"Exactly, my dear," said the doctor; "but it is a moral certainty that the gentleman will be married."

"Well, yes, I suppose so," replied Mrs Doctor.

"Suppose so? Why, they'd combine and kill him for an unnatural monster if he did not marry one of them," said the doctor, laughing. "Well, then, my dear, suppose we reverse the case, and take a young and very handsome lady to a station in an out-of-the-way part of the world, where the proportions are as one to twenty—one lady to twenty gentlemen—what is the moral result?"

"I suppose she would be sure to be married?"

"Exactly, my dear. Well, as our handsome young charge evidently thinks a very great deal about love-making—"

"A very great deal too much," said Mrs Doctor, tartly.

"Exactly so, my dear. Well, she is going to such a place. What ought we to do?"

"See of course that she does not make a foolish match."

"Ex—actly!" cried the doctor. "Well, Harley seems to have taken a fancy to her at once. Good man—good position—not too old."

"I don't know," said the lady, dubiously, "I don't quite think they would match."

"I do," said the doctor, sharply. "The very man. Plenty of firmness. He's as genial and warm-hearted as a man can be; but he has a will like iron. He'd break in my young madam there; and, by Jove! ma'am, if I am a judge of woman's nature—"

"Which you are not, sir," said the lady, sharply. "Well, perhaps not; but I do say this—if ever there was a Petruchio cut out for our handsome, dark-eyed Katherine, then Neil Harley is the man!"

"Here, doctor, where are you? Come along!" cried the gentleman in question. "Music—music! Miss Perowne has promised to sing!"

"Have you been persuading her, Mr Harley?" said the little lady.

"I? My dear madam, no! She refused me; but has been listening to the blandishments of Captain Lindley; and—there—she is beginning. By Jove! what a voice!"

Lieutenant Chumbley.

A rapid and pleasant voyage, with a touch here and there at the various ports, giving the two girls, just fresh from their life of seclusion, a glance at the strange mixture of nationalities collected together in these pauses of commercial transit.

It was one continuous scene of interest to Grey Stuart, who was never weary of gazing at the hurrying crowds and the strange customs of these far-off towns; while Helen, if persuaded to land, found the heat too oppressive, and preferred a cane lounge in the shade of an awning, with four or five gentlemen in attendance with fans, iced water, or fruit.

The Resident was constant in his attentions to her, and tried, whenever the steamer put into port, to get her to join some excursion, the most notable of which was at Ceylon; but she invariably refused, when he would laughingly turn to Grey and ask her to be his companion.

Mrs Doctor looked serious at first; but, particular as she was, she gave way, for the Resident's behaviour to the bright English girl was beyond reproach.

"You'll understand Harley better by-and-by," said the doctor. "He's a very old friend of her father, and he might be the girl's uncle from his way."

"But do you think it will be proper to let her go?" said the little lady.

"I'll answer for Harley's conduct, my dear. If ever there was a gentleman it is he. Let her go."

So Grey often became Neil Harley's companion in these excursions, returning delighted with the wonders of each place; while the Resident was loud in his praises of her quiet, sensible appreciation of all they saw.

"She's a very amiable, sweet, intelligent girl, Mrs Bolter," he said one evening, as he sat with the doctor and his wife.

"Do you think so, Mr Harley?" said the lady drily.

"Indeed I do, ma'am," he replied, "and I am very proud to know her."

"Better hook her, Harley," said the doctor, with a twinkle of the eye, as he saw his wife's serious, suspicious glances. "She'll be caught up like a shot."

"Then I hope you and Mrs Bolter will help and see that she makes no foolish match. I beg her pardon, though," he added, hastily; "she is not a girl who would do that."

"You are first in the field," said the doctor, in spite of an admonitory shake of the head from his lady. "Why not make your hay while the sun shines?"

The Resident sat gazing very seriously out at sea, and his voice was very low and tender as he replied:

"No; Miss Stuart is a young lady for whom I feel just such sentiments as I should presume a man would feel for his bright, intelligent child. That is all, Mrs Bolter," he said, turning quickly. "I ought to congratulate you upon the warm hold you have upon Miss Grey's affections."

He rose then and walked away, with the little doctor's wife watching him intently.

"Henry," she said suddenly, "that man is either a very fine fellow or else he is an arch-hypocrite."

"Well, I'll vouch he isn't the last," said the doctor, warmly, "for I've known him ten years, and I've had him down twice with very severe attacks of fever. I know him by heart. I've sounded him all over, heart, lungs, liver: he hasn't a failing spot in his whole body."

"Bless the man!" said Mrs Doctor, "just as if that had anything to do with his character for honesty and truth. Now look there, Henry, really I cannot bear it much longer. That girl's conduct is scandalous?"

"What, Grey Stuart's?"

"No; absurd! Helen Perowne's. Why the young men all seem to be mad."

"Moths round a candle," said the doctor. "There, don't worry yourself, my dear, it's only her way. She loves admiration, and young fellows admire her, so it suits both sides."

"But I don't like a young lady who is under our charge to be so fond of admiration."

"Oh, there's no harm in her. She is one of those ladies who seem to have been born to exact attention; and as there are plenty ready to pay toll, why, what does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal," said the little lady, indignantly; "and no good will come of it. One day she is trying to lead Mr Harley at her heels like a lapdog; the next day it is Captain Lindley; the next, Mr Adjutant Morris; then Lieutenant Barlow. Why, she was making eyes at Captain Pennelle yesterday at dinner. I declare the girl seems quite to infatuate the men, and you see if trouble does not come of it."

"Oh, tut! tut! Nonsense, my dear, what trouble should come?"

“Quarrels, and duels, and that sort of thing.”

“Men don’t fight duels now, my dear. Oh, no, don’t you be uneasy. We shall soon be at Sindang now, and then we can hand your incubus over to papa Perowne, and be free of it all.”

“I shall be very glad, I’m sure,” said the lady. “There look at her. I suppose that’s the last conquest!”

“Whom do you mean?” said the doctor, drowsily, for he had just settled himself for a nap in the yielding cane chair.

“That great, tall young officer, who came on board at Colombo.”

“Oh, Chumbley,” said the doctor, looking up and following his wife’s eyes to where a great broad-shouldered fellow was bending down talking to Helen Perowne, who seemed to be listening eagerly to his words, as if on purpose to annoy the half-dozen gentlemen forming her court.

He was a fine, well-set-up young fellow, looking like a lifeguardsman picked from among a selection of fair, curly-haired Saxons, and, evidently flattered by the lady’s notice, he was doing his best to make himself agreeable.

“You may call it what you like,” said Mrs Doctor. “I call it scandalous! Here’s the very last arrival in the ship.”

“Regularly subjugated,” laughed the doctor.

“It is nothing to laugh at,” said the lady, indignantly. “I declare I have a good mind to go and interfere.”

“No, no, don’t,” said the doctor earnestly. “She means no harm, and you may only make a breach between you.”

“I don’t care, Henry; it is for the girl’s sake that I should interfere; and as to the breach, she utterly detests me as it is for what I have said. I think she hates me as much as I do her.”

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Mary, you could not hate anyone; and as to Helen Perowne’s foolish coquetry, it will all settle down into the love of some stout brave fellow.”

“Such as that of Lieutenant Chumbley.”

“Perhaps so.”

“Well I hope so, I’m sure. One ought to have a big strong man to keep all the others away, for if ever there was a heartless coquette it is she; and the sooner we can place her in her father’s hands the happier I shall be.”

“Would you mind whisking a fly off now and then with your handkerchief, Mary,” said the little doctor, drowsily, as he settled himself for his nap.

“I know there’ll be some mischief come out of it all,” said the little lady, as she drove a couple of flies from her husband’s nose.

“Only—few days—old Perowne—sure to meet us, and—”

The handkerchief was kept busily whisking about, for the flies were tiresome, and the doctor was fast asleep, only turning restlessly now and then, when in her eagerness to watch Helen Perowne and Lieutenant Chumbley—the young officer coming out to join the regiment into which he had exchanged with the hope of getting variety and sport—Mrs Doctor forgot to act as guardian against the flies.

Volume One—Chapter Sixteen.

A Dangerous Creature.

At last Mrs Bolter’s troubles were, as she said, at an end, for the great steamer had transferred a portion of her passengers to the station gunboat at the mouth of the Darak river. There had been a quick run up between the low shores dense with their growth of mangrove and nipah palm. The station had been reached, and the ladies transferred to the arms of their fathers, both waiting anxiously for the coming boat upon the Resident’s island, where in close connection with the fort Mr Harley’s handsome bungalow had been built.

For the first few days all was excitement at Sindang, for the report of the beauty of “Old Stuart’s” daughter, and above all that of the child of the principal merchant in the place, created quite a furore among the officers of the two companies of foot stationed at the fort, and the young merchants and civil officers of the place.

“It is really a very, very great relief, Henry,” said Mrs Doctor. “I can sleep as easily again now those girls are off my hands. I mean that girl; but really I don’t feel so satisfied as I should like, for though I know Helen Perowne to be safe in her father’s charge, I am not at all sure that my responsibility has ceased.”

“Ah, you must do what you can for the motherless girls, my dear. Eh, Arthur? what do you say?”

“I quite agree with you, Harry,” said the new chaplain, quietly; “but the change to here is—is rather confusing at first.”

“Oh, you’ll soon settle down, old fellow; and I say, Mary, my dear, it is a beautiful place, is it not?”

"Very, very beautiful indeed," replied the little lady; "but it is very hot."

"Well, say warmish," said the doctor, chuckling; "but I did not deceive you about that. You'll soon get used to it, and you won't be so ready to bustle about; you must take it coolly."

"As you do?" said Mrs Doctor, smiling.

"As I do? Oh, I'm the doctor, and here is every one getting his or her liver out of order during my absence! My hands are terribly full just now; but we shall soon settle down. How is the church getting on, Arthur?"

"Slowly, my dear Harry," said the Reverend Arthur, in his quiet way. "They are making the improvements I suggested. Mr Perowne subscribed handsomely, and Mr Harley is supplying more labour; but I'm afraid I was rather negligent this morning, for I strolled away towards the woods."

"Jungle, my dear fellow, jungle! but don't go again without me; I'm more at home here than you."

"But the woods—I mean jungle—looked so beautiful; surely there is nothing to fear."

"Not much—with care," replied the doctor, "but still there are dangers—fever, sunstroke, tigers, crocodiles, poisonous serpents, venomous insects and leeches."

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mrs Doctor. "Arthur, you are on no account to go again!"

"But, my dear Mary—" said the chaplain, meekly.

"Now, don't argue, Arthur. I say you are on no account to go again!"

"But really, my dear Mary—"

"I will listen to no excuse, Arthur. Unless Henry, who understands the place, accompanies you, I forbid your going again. I hope you have not been into any other dangerous place."

"Oh, no, my dear Mary; I only went and called upon Mr Perowne." Mrs Bolter started, and the doctor burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried. "Why, my dear boy, that's a far more dangerous place than the jungle."

"I—I do not understand you, Henry," said the chaplain, with a faint flush in his cheek.

"Not understand me, my dear fellow! Why, Perowne keeps a most ferocious creature there, and it's loose too."

"Loose?" cried Mrs Doctor, excitedly.

"Oh, yes: I've seen it about the grounds, parading up and down on the lawn by the river, and in the house as well."

"Gracious me, Henry, the man must be mad! What is it?" cried Mrs Bolter.

"Regular tigress—man-eater," said the doctor.

"And you allowed your brother-in-law to go there without warning, Henry? Really, I am surprised at you!"

"Oh! pooh, pooh!" ejaculated the doctor. "Arthur can take care of himself."

"And here have I accepted an invitation for all of us to go there the week after next to dinner! I won't go. I certainly will not go."

"Nonsense, my dear Mary—nonsense!" said the doctor, with his eyes twinkling. "We must go. Perowne would be horribly put out if we did not."

"Now look here, Henry, when I was a maiden lady I never even kept a cat or a dog, because I said to myself that live animals about a house might be unpleasant to one's friends. So how do you suppose that when I have become a married lady I am going to sanction the presence of dangerous monsters in a house?"

"Oh, but it won't hurt you," said the doctor. "I tell you it's a man-eater. We must go, Mary."

"I certainly must beg of you not to ask me," said the little lady. "My dear Harry, it gives me great pain to go against your wishes, but I could not—I really could not go."

"Not if I assured you it was perfectly safe?"

"If you gave me that assurance, Henry, I—I think I would go; for I believe you would not deceive me."

"Never," said the doctor, emphatically. "Well, I assure you that you need not be under the slightest apprehension."

"But is it chained up, Harry?"

"Well, no, my dear," replied the little doctor; "they could not very well chain her up. But I was there yesterday though, and I saw that Perowne had given her a very handsome chain."

"Then why doesn't he chain her up? I shall certainly tell Mr Perowne that he ought. This comes of the poor man

having no wife and living out in these savage parts. Really, Henry, I don't think we ought to go."

"Oh! pooh, pooh—nonsense, my dear! You've nothing to mind. I'm not afraid of her. I'll take care of you."

"I know you are very good, and brave, and strong, Harry," said the little lady, smiling, "and if you say it is safe I will go, for I do trust in your knowledge, and—there, now, I declare I am quite angry! You are laughing, sir! I'm sure there is some trick!"

"Trick? What trick?" cried the doctor, chuckling.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that Mr Perowne has a wild tigress running about his place?"

"Oh, no; I never said a wild tigress—did I, Arthur?"

"I—I did not quite hear what you said, Henry," replied the chaplain.

"You said a dangerous creature—a sort of tigress, sir."

"Right, so I did; and so he has."

"What is it then?" said Mrs Doctor, very sharply.

"A handsome young woman," chuckled the doctor—"his daughter Helen."

"Now, Henry, I do declare that you are insufferable!" cried Mrs Doctor, angrily, as her brother rose softly, walked to the window of the pretty palm-thatched bungalow, and stood gazing out at the bright flowers with which the doctor had surrounded his place.

"Well, it's true enough," chuckled the doctor. "I never saw such a girl in my life. She has had that great fellow Chumbley hanging after her for weeks, and now—"

"And now what, sir?"

Perhaps it was the wind, but certainly just then there was a sound as of a faint sigh from somewhere by the window, and it seemed as if the chaplain was recalling the past days of repose at his little home near Mayleyfield, and wondering whether he had done right to come; but no one heeded him, and the doctor went on:

"Now she seems to have lassoed young Hilton."

"What, Captain Hilton?"

"Yes, my dear, with a silken lasso; and he is all devotion."

"Henry, you astound me!" cried Mrs Doctor. "Why, I thought that Mr Harley meant something there."

"So did I," said the doctor, "but it seems all off. Harley and Chumbley cashiered, *vice* Hilton—the reigning hero of the day."

"Of the day indeed!" exclaimed Mrs Doctor. "I never did see such a girl. It is dreadful."

"And yet you scolded me for calling her a dangerous creature."

"Well, I must own that she is, Henry," said Mrs Doctor; and once more there was a faint sigh by the window.

"She's a regular man-trap, my dear, and practises with her eyes upon everyone she sees. I don't think even her great-grandfather would be safe. She actually smiled at me yesterday."

"What?" cried the little lady.

"Perowne sent for me, you know."

"Yes, of course, I remember. Go on, Henry."

"They'd been out together—she wanted to see the Residency island—and then nothing would do but she must have a walk in the jungle; and then, I don't know whether she began making eyes at the leeches, but half a dozen fastened upon her, of course."

"Why, of course, sir?"

"Because she went out walking in ridiculous high-heeled low shoes, with fancy stockings."

"Well, Henry, how tiresomely prolix you are!"

"Well, that's all, my dear, only that the leeches fastened on her feet and ankles."

"And did Mr Perowne send for you to take them off?"

"Well, not exactly, my dear, they pulled them off themselves; but one bite would not stop bleeding, and I had to apply a little pad on the instep—wonderfully pretty little ankles and insteps, my dear, when the stockings are off."

"Doctor Bolter!" exclaimed the little lady in so severe a tone of voice that the subject of Helen Perowne was dismissed, and the culprit allowed to go to his little surgery to see to the compounding of some medicines necessary for his sick.

Volume One—Chapter Seventeen.

Doctor Bolter's Theory.

In a little Eastern settlement, in spite of feelings of caste, the Europeans are so few that rules of society are to a certain extent set aside, so that people mix to a greater degree than in larger towns. In spite of her rather particular, and, to be truthful, rather sharp, old-maidish ways, Mrs Bolter soon found herself heartily welcomed by all, and readily accorded, as the doctor's wife, almost a leading position in the place.

This position would by rights have been given to the lady of the principal merchant, but Mr Perowne had lost his wife when Helen was very young; and Isaac Stuart—"Old Stuart," as he was generally called—was no better off, his daughter Grey having been left motherless at a very early age.

The idea of Mr Perowne was that upon his daughter joining him she should take the lead and give receptions; and to this end the first party was arranged, to which Mr and Mrs Doctor Bolter and the chaplain had been invited, the time rapidly coming round, and the guests assembling at Mr Perowne's handsome house, where the luxurious dinner, served in the most admirable manner by the soft-footed, quiet Chinese servants, passed off without a hitch; and at last, with a smile that seemed to have the effect of being directed at every gentleman at table, Helen Perowne rose, and the ladies left the room.

The conversation soon became general, and then the doctor's voice rose in opposition to a laugh raised against something he had said.

"Oh, yes," he cried, "laugh and turn everything I say into ridicule: I can bear it. I have not been out all these years in the jungle for nothing."

"Does Mrs Bolter approve of your theory, doctor?" said the Resident.

"I have not mentioned it to her, sir," replied the doctor, glancing at the curtains looped over the open doorway; "and if you have no objection, I will make the communication myself. My journey home and my marriage have put it a good deal out of my head. But what I want to tell all here is, that the thing is as plain as the nose on your face."

Mr Harley, to whom this was principally addressed, gently stroked the bridge of his aquiline nose, half closed his eyes, and smiled in a good-humoured way.

"That's right," said the doctor. "Go on unbelieving. Some day I'll give you the most convincing proofs that what I say is right."

"But will Mrs Bolter approve of your running wild in the jungle now you are married?" said the Resident, quietly.

"Pooh, sir—pooh, sir! My wife is a very sensible little woman, isn't she, Arthur?" he cried; and the chaplain smiled and bowed before lapsing into a dreamy state, and sitting back in his chair, gazing at the curtains hanging softly across the open door.

"Oh, we're ready enough to believe, doctor," said the Resident; "don't be offended."

"Pooh! I'm not offended," exclaimed the doctor. "All discoveries get laughed at till the people are forced to believe. Here, young man, you've had enough fruit," he cried sharply, as one of the party stretched forth his hand to help himself to the luscious tropic fruits with which the table was spread.

"What a tyrant you are, doctor," said the young officer.

"Here, boy," cried the doctor, to one of the silent Chinese servants gliding about the table, "more ice.—You're as unbelieving as John Chinaman here."

"We'll believe fast enough, doctor," said the last speaker; "but it is only fair that we should ask for facts."

"Facts, Captain Hilton," said the doctor, turning sharply upon the sun-tanned young officer, who, like the rest of the party, was attired in white, for the heat of the large, lightly-furnished room was very great, "facts, sir? What do you want? Haven't you your Bible, and does it not tell you that Solomon's ships went to Ophir, and brought back gold, and apes, and peacocks?"

"Yes," said Captain Hilton, "certainly;" and the Reverend Arthur bowed his head.

"Oh, you'll grant that," said the little doctor, with a smile of triumph and a glance round the table.

"Of course," said the young officer, taking a cigarette.

"I say, Doctor," said the Resident—"or no; I'll ask your brother-in-law. Mr Rosebury, did the doctor ventilate his astounding theory over in England?"

"No," replied the chaplain, smiling, "I have never heard him propound any theory."

"I thought not," said the Resident. "Go on, doctor."

"I don't mind your banter," said the little doctor, good-humouredly. "Now look here, Captain Hilton, I want to know what more you wish for. There's Malacca due south of where you are sitting, and there lies Mount Ophir to the east."

"But there is a Mount Ophir in Sumatra," said Lieutenant Chumbley, the big, heavy dragoon-looking fellow, who had not yet spoken.

"In Sumatra?" cried the doctor. "Bah, sir, bah! That isn't Solomon's place at all. I tell you I've investigated the whole thing. Here's Ophir east of Malacca, with its old gold workings all about the foot of the mountain; there are the apes in the trees—Boy, more ice."

"And where are the peacocks?" drawled Chumbley.

"Hark at him!" cried the doctor; "he says where are the peacocks? Look here, Mr Chumbley, if you would take a gun, or a geologist's hammer, and exercise your limbs and your understanding, instead of dangling about after young ladies—"

"Shouldn't have brought them out, doctor," drawled the young fellow, coolly.

"Or say a collecting-box and a cyanide bottle," continued the doctor, "instead of getting your liver into a torpid state by sitting and lying under trees and verandas smoking and learning to chew betel like the degraded natives, you would not ask me where are the peacocks?"

"I don't know where they are, doctor," said the young man, slowly.

"In the jungle, sir, in the jungle, which swarms with the lovely creatures, and with pheasants too. Pff! 'tis hot—Boy, more ice."

"Don't be so hard on a fellow, doctor," drawled the lieutenant. "I'm new to the country, and I've twice as much body to carry about as you have. You're seasoned and tough; I'm young and tender. So the jungle swarms with peacocks, does it?"

"Yes, sir, swarms," said the doctor, with asperity. "Well," said Chumbley, languidly, "let it swarm! I knew it swarmed with mosquitoes."

"Sir," said the doctor, contemptuously, as he glanced at the great frame of the young officer, "you never exert yourself, and I don't believe, sir, that you know what is going on within a mile of the Residency."

"I really don't believe I do," said the young man, with a sleepy yawn. "I say, Mr Perowne, can't you give us a little more air?"

"My dear Mr Chumbley," said the host, a thin, slightly grey, rather *distingué* man, "every door and window is wide open. Take a little more iced cup."

"It makes a fellow wish he were a frog," drawled the lieutenant. "I should like to go and lie right in the water with only my nose in the air."

As he spoke he gazed sleepily through his half-closed eyes at the broad, moonlit river gliding on like so much molten silver, while on the farther bank the palms stood up in columns, spreading their great fronds like lace against the spangled purple sky.

Below them, playing amidst the bushes and undergrowth that fringed the river, it seemed as if nature had sent the surplus of her starry millions from sky to earth, for the leaves were dotted with fire-flies scintillating and flashing in every direction. A dense patch of darkness would suddenly blaze out with hundreds of soft, lambent sparks, then darken again for another patch to be illumined, as the wondrous insects played about like magnified productions of the points of light that run through well-burned tinder.

From time to time there would be a faint splash rise from the river, and the water rippled in the moonbeams, sounds then well understood by the occupants of Mr Perowne's dining-room, for as the languid lieutenant made another allusion to the pleasure of being a frog, the doctor said, laughing: "Try it Chumbley; you are young and tolerably plump, and it would make a vacancy for another sub. The crocodiles would bless you."

"Two natives were carried off last week while bathing on the bank," said a sharp, harsh voice, and a little, thin, dry man who had been lying back in an easy-chair with a handkerchief over his head raised himself and passed his glass to be filled with claret and iced water. "Hah! Harley," he continued, with a broad Scotch accent, "you ought to put down crocodiles. What's the use of our having a Resident if he is not to suppress every nuisance in the place?"

"Put down crocodiles, Mr Stuart, eh? Rather a task!"

"Make these idle young officers shoot them then, instead of dangling after our daughters. Set Chumbley to work."

"The crocodiles never hurt me," drawled the young man. "Rather ugly, certainly, but they've a nice open style of countenance. I like hunting and shooting, but I don't see any fun in making yourself a nuisance to everything that runs or flies, as the doctor there does, shooting, and skinning and sticking pins through 'em, and putting them in glass cases with camphor. I hope you don't do much of that sort of thing, Mr Rosebury?"

"I? Oh, no," said the Reverend Arthur, raising his eyes from a dreamy contemplation of the doorway, through which a

pleasant murmur of female voices came. "I—I am afraid I am guilty as to insects."

"But you draw the line at crocodiles, I suppose? Poor brutes! They never had any education, and if you put temptation in their way, of course they'll tumble in."

"And then repent and shed crocodile's tears," said Captain Hilton, smiling.

"A vulgar error, sir!" said the doctor, sharply. "Crocodiles have no tear-secreting glands."

"They could not wipe their eyes in the water if they had, doctor," said Captain Hilton, merrily.

"Of course not, sir," said the doctor; "but as I was saying, gentlemen, when Solomon's ships—"

"I say, Perowne," interrupted the little Scotch merchant, in his harsh voice, "hadn't we better join the ladies? If Bolter is going to ventilate his theory I shall go to sleep."

"I've done," said the doctor, leaning back and thrusting his hands into his pockets; "but I must say, Stuart, that as an old resident in these parts I think you might give a little attention to a fact of great historical interest, and one that might lead to a valuable discovery of gold. What do you say, Perowne?"

"I leave such matters to you scientific gentlemen," said the host, carefully flicking a scrap of cigar-ash from his shirt-front.

"You can't tempt Perowne," laughed the little Scot. "He is a regular Mount Ophir in himself, and," he added to himself, "has a flaunting peacock—I mean peahen—of his own."

"Nay, nay, Stuart," said the host, smiling meaningly; "I am not a rich man."

"Oh, no," chuckled his brother merchant; "he's as poor as a Jew."

Mr Perowne shook his head at his harsh-voiced guest, glanced round suavely, as if asking permission of his guests, and then rose from the handsomely-furnished table.

"Then we will join the ladies," he said, blandly; and the Chinese servants drew aside the light muslin curtains which hung in graceful folds over the arched door.

It was but a few steps across a conservatory, the bright tints of whose rich tropical flowers and lustrous sheen of whose leaves were softened and subdued by the light of some half-dozen large Chinese lanterns, cleverly arranged so as to give the finest effect to the gorgeous plants.

Here several of the party paused for a few moments to gaze through another muslin-draped portal into the drawing-room, whose shaded lamps with their heavy silken fringes cast a subdued light upon a group, the sight of which had a strange effect upon several of the men.

There, in the darker part of the beautifully-furnished room, where the taste of Paris was mingled with the highest and airiest ornamentation of the East, sat little Mrs Doctor very far back in a cane chair—wide awake, as she would have declared had anyone spoken, but with her mouth open, and a general vacancy of expression upon her countenance suggestive of some wonder visible in the land of dreams.

Close by her, upon a low seat, was Grey Stuart, looking very simple and innocent in her diaphanous white dress; but there was trouble in her gentle eyes, and her lips seemed pinched as if with pain, as now and then one of her hands left the work upon which she was engaged to push back a wave of her thick soft hair.

She too was partly in shadow, but as she pushed back the thick fair hair, it was possible to see that there were faint lines of care in her white forehead, for she too was gazing at the group that had taken the attention of the gentlemen leaving their dessert.

For in the centre of the room, just where the soft glow of one of the shaded lamps formed quite a halo round her glistening dark hair, and seemed to add lustre to her large, well-shaped eyes, reclined Helen Perowne. Her attitude was graceful, and evidently studied for effect. One hand rested on the back of the well-stuffed ottoman, so as to display the rounded softness of her shapely arm; while her head was thrown back to place at the same advantage her creamy-hued well-formed throat, and at the same time to allow its owner to turn her gaze from time to time upon the companion standing beside her, grave, statuesque, and calm, but with all the fire of his Eastern nature glowing in his large dark eyes, which needed no interpreter to tell the tale they told.

"A nigger now!" said Lieutenant Chumbley to himself, with a look of contempt at the handsome young hostess. "Well, there's no knowing what that girl would do."

"The rajah—the sultan!" muttered Captain Hilton, with a furiously-jealous look. "How dare he! The insolent, dark-skinned cad!"

"Flying at a seat upon an ivory throne in a palm-tree palace, eh, Helen?" mused the Resident, with a quiet smile. "Well, you will exhaust them all in time?"

These thoughts ran through the brains of each of the spectators of the little scene within the drawing-room in turn, but only one of the dinner-party spoke aloud, and that was in a low voice in another's ear.

It was the little Scotchman, Grey Stuart's father, who spoke, as he laid his hand upon his host's shoulder.

"Perowne, mahn," he whispered, "ye'll have a care there, and speak to your lass, for there'll be the deil's own mischief, and murder too, if she leads that fellow on."

Volume One—Chapter Eighteen.

Helen Perowne at Home.

Sultan Murad, who, from the aspect of affairs in Mr Perowne's drawing-room, seemed to be the last captive to the bow of Helen's lips and the arrows of her eyes, was one of the rajahs of the Malay peninsula, living upon friendly terms with the English, paying allegiance to the government, and accepting the friendly services of a Political Resident, in the shape of Mr Harley, whose duties were to advise him in his rule, to help him in any plans for civilising and opening out his country; and in exchange for his alliance and friendly offices with neighbouring chiefs, who viewed the coming of the English with jealous eyes, the rajah was promised the help of the English arms in time of need. As an earnest of this promise, a couple of companies of an English foot regiment were permanently stationed upon a little island in the river, just opposite to Sindang, the principal native town of Jullah, over which territory Sultan Murad reigned.

But the Prince only adopted such of the English customs as suited his tastes. He had no objection, though a follower of Mahomet, to the wines that were introduced, showing a great preference for champagne. Our dress he took to at once, making a point of always appearing in indigo-blue silk stockings and patent-leather shoes. The widest-fronted shirts were spread over his broad breast, and the tail-coat found so much favour that he had to exercise a good deal of self-denial to keep himself from appearing all day long in full evening-dress.

But he had good advisers to help his natural shrewdness, and finding that his adoption of our costume found favour with his English allies, he adhered to it rigorously, as far as his position as sultan or rajah would allow. For there was and is one part of the native dress that no Malay will set aside, and that is the sarong, a tartan scarf sewn together at the ends and worn in folds around the body, so as to form a kilt.

This article of dress, always a check or plaid of some showy-coloured pattern, is worn by every Malay, in silk or cotton, according to his station, and in the sash-like folds he always carries his kris, a dangerous-looking dagger, that falsely bears the reputation of being smeared along its wavy blade with poison.

A silken kilt and a dagger are rather *outré* objects for an English drawing-room, and looked barbaric and strange as worn by the young rajah, whose evening-dress was otherwise in faultless English style, being in fact the production of a certain tailor, of Savile Row, an artist who had been largely patronised by Murad for shooting and morning gear, and also for his especial pride, a couple of gorgeous uniforms, something between that of a hussar and a field-marshal bound to a review.

The bad name given to a dog dies hard, and in spite of steam and electricity, the idea still lingers in our midst that the Malay is as evil as his kris, and that he is a brutal savage, accustomed to put forth from his campong in a long row-boat, or prahu, to make a piratical attack upon some becalmed vessel. After this it is supposed to be his custom to put the crew to death, plunder the ship, and set it on fire as a finish to his task.

Such deeds have been done, for there are roughs amongst the Malays, even as there are in civilised England. In bygone days, too, such acts were doubtless as common as among our border chieftains; but, as a rule, the Malays are an educated body of eastern people, professing the Mahomedan religion, with an excellent code of laws, punctilious in etiquette, and though exceedingly simple in their habits, far from wanting in refinement.

Sultan Murad was unmistakably a prince, handsome in person, and naturally of a grave and dignified mien, while since his alliance with the English he had become so thoroughly imbued with our habits and the ordinary ways of a gentleman as to make him a visitor well worthy of Helen's attention for the time.

There was something delightful to her vanity in the eastern term "sultan," a title associated in her mind with barbaric splendour, showers of diamonds and pearls, cloth of gold, elephants with silver howdahs, attended by troops of slaves bearing peacock fans, chowries, and palm-leaf punkahs. She saw herself in imagination mounted upon some monstrous beast, with a veil of gossamer texture covering her face; a troop of beautiful slaves in attendance, and guards with flashing weapons jealously watching on every side the approach of those who would dare to sun themselves in her beauty.

Her thoughts were so pleasant, that in place of the languid air of repose in her dark, shaded eyes, they would flash out as she listened with a gratified smile to Murad's eastern compliments and the soft deference in his voice.

He was a real sultan, who, when with the English, adopted their customs; while with his people no doubt he would assume his barbaric splendour; and to Helen, fresh as it were from school, and, revelling in the joys of her new-born power, there was something delicious in finding that she had a real eastern potentate among her slaves.

The Rajah had been talking to her in his soft, pleasant English for some time before the gentlemen left the dining-room. Now Neil Harley separated himself from the rest, sauntered across, nodded to the Rajah, who drew back, and made a flash dart from the young Malay's eyes as he saw the Resident seat himself in a careless, quite-at-home fashion beside the young hostess.

"Well, Mad'moiselle Helen," he whispered in a half-contemptuous tone, "how many more conquests this week?"

"I do not understand you, Mr Harley," she said, coldly; but he noticed that she could hardly manage to contain the annoyance she felt at his cavalier manner.

"Don't you?" he said, smiling and half closing his eyes. "As you please, most chilling and proud of beauties. What lucky men those are who find themselves allowed to bask in the sunshine of your smiles! There, that is the proper, youthful way of expressing it poetically, is it not?"

"If you wish to insult me, pray say so, Mr Harley, and I will at once leave the room," said Helen, in a low voice, as if wishful that the Rajah should not hear her words, but making the Malay's countenance lower as he saw the familiar way in which she was addressed.

"Insult you? All the saints and good people past and to come forbid! It is you who, after making me your slave, turn from me, the elderly beau, to listen to the voice of our dusky charmer. I don't mind. I am going to chat and listen to little Grey Stuart. I shall be patient, because I know that some day you will return to me cloyed with conquests, and say, 'Neil Harley, I am yours!'"

"I do not understand you," she cried, quickly.

"Let me be explicit then," he said, mockingly. "Some day the fair Helen will come to me and say, with her pretty hands joined together, 'Neil Harley, I am tired of slaying men. I have been very wicked, and cruel, and coquettish. I have wounded our chaplain; I have slain red-coated officers; I have trampled a Malayan sultan beneath my feet; but I know that you have loved me through it all. Forgive me and take me; I am humble now—I am yours!'"

"Mr Harley!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "How dare you speak to me like this in my father's house."

As she spoke her eyes seemed to flash with anger, and he ought to have quailed before her; but he met her gaze with a calm, mastering look, and said slowly:

"Yes, you are very beautiful, and I do not wonder at your triumph in your power; but it is not love, Helen, and some day you will, as I tell you, be weary of all this adulation, and think of what I have said. I am in no hurry; and of course all this will be when you have had your reign as the most beautiful coquette in the East."

"Mr Harley, if you were not my father's old friend—"

"Exactly, my dear child; old friend, who has your father's wishes for my success with his daughter—old friend, who has known you by report since a child. I have been waiting for you, my dear, and you see I behave with all the familiarity accorded to a man of middle age."

"Mr Harley, your words are insufferable!" said Helen, still in a low voice.

"You think so now, my dear child. But there: I have done. Don't look so cross and indignant, or our friend the Rajah will be using his kris upon me as I go home. I can see his hand playing with it now, although he has it enveloped in the folds of his silken sarong in token of peace."

"I beg you will go," said Helen, contemptuously; "you are keeping the Rajah away."

"Which would be a pity," said the Resident, smiling. "He is a very handsome fellow, our friend Murad."

"I have hardly heeded his looks," said Helen, weakly; and then she flushed crimson as she saw Mr Harley's mocking smile.

"Doosid strange, those fellows can't come into a gentleman's drawing-room without their skewers," said Chumbley, coming up and overhearing the last words. "I say, Miss Perowne, you ought to have stayed and heard the doctor give us a lecture on Ophir and Solomon's ships. Capital, wasn't it, Hilton?"

"Really I hardly heard it," replied the young officer, approaching Helen with a smile; and the Resident met the lady's eye, and gave her a mocking look, as he rose and made place for the new-comer, who was welcomed warmly. "I was thinking about our hostess, and wondering how long it would be before we were to be emancipated from old customs and allowed to enter the drawing-room."

"Yes, it is strange how we English cling to our customs, and bring them out even to such places as this," said the lady, letting her eyes rest softly upon those of the young officer, and there allowing them to stop; but giving a quick glance the next moment at the Rajah, who, with a fixed smile upon his face, was sending lowering looks from one to the other of those who seemed to have ousted him and monopolised the lady's attention.

"I never felt our customs so tedious as they were to-night," said Captain Hilton, earnestly; and bending down, he began to talk in a subdued voice, while the gentlemen proceeded to discuss mercantile matters, the probability of the neighbouring Malay princess—the Inche Maida—taking to herself a lord; the latest move made by the governor; and other matters more or less interesting to the younger men.

At last Chumbley, seeing that Harley was chatting with Grey Stuart, crossed over to the doctor's little lady, who had rather a troubled, uneasy look in her pleasant face as she watched her brother, the chaplain, hanging about as if to catch a word let drop by Helen now and then.

Volume One—Chapter Nineteen.

Signs of the Times.

"Well, Mrs Bolter," drawled Chumbley, "who's going to carry off the prize?"

"What prize?" cried the little lady, sharply.

"The fair Helen," said the young man, with a smile.

"You, I should say," said Mrs Bolter, with more asperity in her tone.

"Chaff!" said Chumbley; and he went on, slowly, "Won't do, Mrs Doctor; I'm too slow for her. She had me in silken strings for a week like a pet poodle; but I soon got tired and jealous of seeing her pet other puppies instead of me, and I was not allowed to bite them, so—"

"Well?" said the doctor's wife, for he had stopped.

"I snapped the string and ran away, and she has never forgiven me."

"Harry Chumbley," said the doctor's wife, shaking her finger at him, "don't you ever try to make me believe again that you are stupid, because, sir, it will not do."

"I never pretend to be," said the young man, with a sluggish laugh, "I'm just as I was made—good, bad and indifferent. I don't think I'm more stupid than most men. I'm awfully lazy though—too lazy to play the idiot or the lover, or to put up with a flirting young lady's whims; but I say, Mrs Doctor."

"Well?" said the lady.

"I don't want to be meddlesome, but really if I were you, being the regular methodical lady of the station, I should speak seriously to Helen Perowne about flirting with that nigger."

"Has she been flirting with him to-night?" said the lady eagerly.

"Awfully," said Chumbley—"hot and strong. We fellows can stand it, you know, and if we get led on and then snubbed, why it makes us a bit sore, and we growl and try to lick the place, and—there's an end of it."

"Yes—yes—exactly," said the lady, thoughtfully.

"But it's my belief," continued Chumbley, spreading his words out so as to cover a good deal of space, while he made himself comfortable by stretching out his long legs, lowering himself back, and placing his hands under his head—a very ungraceful position, which displayed a gap between his vest and the top of his trousers—"it's my belief, I say, that if Beauty there goes on playing with the Beast in his plaid sarong, and making his opal eyeballs roll into the idea that she cares for him, which she doesn't a single pip—"

"Go on, I'm listening," said the doctor's lady.

"All right—give me time, Mrs Bolter; but that's about all I was going to say, only that I think if she leads him on as she is doing now there will not be an end of it. That's all."

"Well, busy little Grey," said the Resident, merrily, as he seated himself beside the earnest-eyed Scottish maiden, "what is the new piece of needlework now?"

"Only a bit of embroidery, Mr Harley," she replied, giving him a quick, animated glance, and the look of trouble upon her face passing away.

"Ha!" he said, taking up the piece of work and examining it intently, "what a strange thing it is that out in these hot places, while we men grow lazier, you ladies become more industrious. Look at Chumbley for instance, he's growing fatter and slower every day."

"Oh, but he's very nice, and frank, and natural," said Grey with animation.

"Yes," said the Resident, "he's a good fellow. I like Chumbley. But look at the work in that embroidery now—thousands and thousands of stitches. Why what idiots our young fellows are!"

"Why, Mr Harley?" said the girl, wonderingly.

"Why, my child? Because one or the other of them does not make a swoop down and persuade you to let him carry you off."

"Are you all so tired of me already?" said Grey, smiling.

"Tired of you? Oh, no, little one, but it seems to me that you are such a quiet little mouse that they all forget your very existence."

"I am happy enough with my father, and very glad to join him once more, Mr Harley."

"Happy? Of course you are; that seems to be your nature. I never saw a girl so sweet, and happy, and contented."

"Indeed!" said Grey, blushing. "How can I help being happy when everyone is so kind?"

"Kind? Why, of course. Why, let me see," said the Resident, "how time goes; what a number of years it seems since I took you to England and played papa to you?"

"Yes, it does seem a long time ago," said Grey, musingly.

"I never thought that the little girl I petted would ever grow into such a beautiful young lady. Perhaps that is why papa Stuart did not ask me to bring you back."

"Mr Harley!" exclaimed Grey, and a look of pain crossed her face.

"Why, what have I done?" he said.

"Hurt me," she said, simply. "I like so to talk to you that it troubles me when you adopt that complimentary style."

"Then I won't do it again," he said, earnestly. "We won't spoil our old friendship with folly."

"How well you remember, Mr Harley," said the girl, smiling again.

"Remember? Of course I do, my dear. Don't you recollect what jolly feeds of preserved ginger and mango you and I used to have? Ah, it was too bad of you to grow up into a little woman!"

"I don't think we are any the less good friends, Mr Harley," said the girl, looking trustingly up in his face.

"Not a bit," he said. "Do you know, my dear, I think more and more every day that I am going to grow into a staid old bachelor; and if I do I shall have to adopt you as daughter or niece."

"Indeed, Mr Harley."

"Yes, indeed, my dear. Nineteen, eh? and I am forty-four. Heigho! how time goes!"

"I had begun to think, Mr Harley—" said Grey, softly. "May I go on?"

"Go on? Of course, my dear. What had you begun to think?"

"That you would marry Helen."

"Ye-es, several people thought so on shipboard," he said, dreamily. "Nineteen—twenty-one—forty-four. I'm getting quite an old man now, my dear. Hah!" he said, starting, "I daresay Mademoiselle Helen will have plenty of offers."

"Yes," said Grey; "but she should meet with someone firm and strong as well as kind."

"Like your humble servant?" he said, smiling.

"Yes," said Grey, looking ingenuously in his face. "Helen is very sweet and affectionate at heart, only she is so fond of being admired."

"A weakness she will outgrow," said the Resident, calmly. "I like to hear you talk like that, Grey. You are not jealous, then, of the court that is paid to her?"

"I, jealous?" said Grey, smiling. "Do I look so?"

"Not at all," said the Resident; "not at all. Beauty and fortune, they are great attractions for men, my dear, and Helen has both. But, my clever little woman, you ought to teach papa to make a fortune."

Grey shook her head.

"That's the thing to do nowadays, like our host has done. Perowne is very rich, and if papa Stuart had done as well, we should be having plenty of offers for that busy little hand. Yes, a score at your feet."

"Where they would not be wanted," said the girl, quietly.

"Eh? Not wanted?" said the Resident. "What, would you not like to be worshipped, and hold a court like our fair Helen yonder?"

The girl's eyes flashed as she glanced in the direction of the ottoman, where Captain Hilton was talking in a low, earnest voice to Helen Perowne; and then, with a slightly-heightened colour, she went on with her work, shaking her head the while.

"I don't think I shall believe that," said the Resident, banteringly; but as he spoke she looked up at him so searchingly that even he, the middle-aged man of the world, felt disconcerted, and rather welcomed the coming of the little rosy-faced doctor, who advanced on tiptoe, and with a look of mock horror in his face, as he said, softly:

"Let me come here, my dear. Spread one of your dove-wings over me to ensure peace. Madam is wroth with her slave, and I dare not go near her."

"Why, what have you been doing now, doctor?" said Grey, with mock severity.

"Heaven knows, my dear. My name is Nor—I mean Henry—but it ought to have been Benjamin, for I have always got a mess on hand, lots of times as big as anyone else's mess. I'm a miserable man."

Meanwhile the conversation had been continued between the doctor's lady and Chumbley, till the former began to fidget about, to the great amusement of the latter, who, knowing the lady's weakness, lay back with half-closed eyes, watching her uneasy glances as they followed the doctor, till after a chat here and a chat there, he made his way to the couch by Grey Stuart, and began to speak to her, evidently in a most earnest way.

"She's as jealous as a Turk," said Chumbley to himself; and he tightened his lips to keep from indulging in a smile.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr Chumbley," said Mrs Bolter at last.

"No trouble, Mrs Bolter," he replied, slowly, though his tone indicated that it would be a trouble for him to move.

"Thank you. I'll bear in mind what you said about Helen Perowne."

"And that nigger fellow? Ah, do!" said Chumbley, suppressing a yawn.

"Would you mind telling Dr Bolter I want to speak to him for a moment—just a moment?"

"Certainly not," said Chumbley; and he rose slowly, as if a good deal of caution was required in getting his big body perpendicular; after which he crossed to where the doctor was chatting to Grey Stuart.

"Here, doctor, get up," he said. "Your colonel says you are to go to her directly. There's such a row brewing!"

"No, no! Gammon!" said the little man, uneasily. "Mrs Bolter didn't send you, did she?"

"Yes. Honour bright! and if I were you I'd go at once and throw myself on her mercy. You'll get off more easily."

"No, but Chumbley, what is it? 'Pon my word I don't think I've done anything to upset her to-day."

"I don't know. There; she's looking this way! 'Pon my honour, doctor, you'd better go!"

Dr Bolter rose with a sigh, and crossed to his lady, while Chumbley took his place, and threw himself back, laughing softly the while.

"If that was a trick, Mr Chumbley," said Grey, gazing at him keenly, "it is very cruel of you!"

"But it wasn't a trick, Miss Stuart. She sent me to fetch him. The poor little woman was getting miserable because the doctor was so attentive to you."

"Oh, Mr Chumbley, what nonsense," said Grey, colouring. "It is too absurd!"

"So it is," he replied; "but that isn't." She followed the direction of his eyes as he fixed them on Captain Hilton and Helen Perowne, and then, with the flush dying out of her cheeks, she looked at him inquiringly.

"I say, Miss Stuart," he drawled, "don't call me a mischief-maker, please."

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"Because I get chattering to people about Miss Perowne. I wish she'd marry somebody. I say, hasn't she hooked Bertie Hilton?"

There was no reply, and Chumbley went on: "I mean to tell him he's an idiot when he gets back to quarters to-night. I don't believe Helen Perowne cares a *sou* for him. She keeps leading him on till the poor fellow doesn't know whether he stands on his head or his heels, and by-and-by she'll pitch him over."

Grey bent her head a little lower, for there seemed to be a knot in the work upon which she was engaged, but she did not speak.

"I say, Miss Stuart, look at our coffee-coloured friend. Just you watch his eyes. I'll be hanged if I don't think there'll be a row between him and Hilton. He looks quite dangerous!"

"Oh, Mr Chumbley!" cried Grey, gazing at him as if horrified at his words.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," he continued. "Helen Perowne has been leading him on, and now he has been cut to make room for Hilton. These Malay chaps don't understand this sort of thing, especially as they all seem born with the idea that we are a set of common white people, and that one Malay is worth a dozen of us."

"Do—do you think there is danger?" said Grey hoarsely.

"Well, no, perhaps not danger," replied Chumbley, coolly; "but things might turn ugly if they went on. And it's my belief that, if my lady there does not take care, she'll find herself in a mess."

A more general mingling of the occupants of the drawing-room put an end to the various *tête-à-têtes*, and Grey Stuart's present anxiety was somewhat abated; but she did not feel any the more at rest upon seeing that the young rajah had softly approached Hilton, and was smiling at him in an innocently bland way, bending towards him as he spoke, and keeping very close to his side for the rest of the evening.

At last "good-byes" were said, and the party separated, the two young officers walking slowly down towards the landing-stage, to enter a native boat and be rowed to their quarters on the Residency island.

The heat was very great, and but little was said for some minutes, during which Hilton was rapturously thinking of the beauty of Helen's eyes.

"I say, Chum," he said suddenly. "Murad has invited me to go on a hunting-trip with him in the interior. Would you go?"

“Certainly—if—” drawled Chumbley, yawning.

“If? If what!”

“I wanted a kris in my back, and to supply food to the crocodiles.”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty.

A Proposal.

Mr Perowne’s home at Sindang was kept up in almost princely style, and he was regarded as the principal inhabitant of the place. Both English and Chinese merchants consulted him, and the native dealers and rajahs made him the first offers of tin slabs, rice, gambier, gutta-percha, and other products of the country, while a large proportion of the English and French imports that found favour with the Malays were consigned to the house of Perowne and Company.

People said that he must be immensely rich, and he never denied the impeachment, but went on in a quiet, bland way, accepting their hints, polite to all, whether trading or non-trading, while his table was magnificently kept up, and to it the occupants of the station were always made welcome.

When fate places people in the tropics, they make a point of rising early. Helen Perowne was up with the sun, and dressed in a charming French muslin costume, had a delightful drive, which she called upon Grey Stuart to share, before she met her father at breakfast—a meal discussed almost in silence, for Mr Perowne would give a good deal of his attention to business matters over his meals, a habit against which Dr Bolter warned him, but without avail.

The repast was nearly finished, when a servant entered and announced that the Sultan Murad was coming down the river in his dragon-boat, and evidently meant to land at the stage at the bottom of the garden.

“What does he want?” said the merchant, absently. “Been collecting tribute, I suppose, and wants to sell. Go and see if he lands,” he said aloud, “and then come back.”

“This is the way we have to make our money, my dear,” said Perowne, smiling, but without seeing the increased colour in his child’s face.

“The Sultan is here, sir,” said the man, returning.

“Where?” asked Mr Perowne.

“In the drawing-room, sir. Shall I bring in fresh breakfast?”

“I don’t know. I’ll ring. I’ve done, Helen. I say, young lady, what a colour you have got! You stopped out too long in the sun this morning.”

“Oh, no, papa, I think not,” she replied; “but it is hot.”

“You’ll soon get used to that, my dear. I don’t mind the heat at all. Party went off very well last night, I think.”

The merchant was by this time at the door, wondering what proposal the Rajah had to make to him, for all these petty princes stoop to doing a little trading upon their own account, raising rice in large quantities by means of their slaves; but, man of the world as the merchant was, he did not find himself prepared for the proposition that ensued.

In this case Helen was more prepared than her father, though even she was taken by surprise. She had had her suspicions that the Rajah might take her soft glances and gently-spoken words as sufficient permission for him to speak to her father; and though she trembled at the possible result, there was something so deliciously gratifying to her vanity that she could not help enjoying the position.

To be asked in marriage by a real sultan! What would the Miss Twettenhams say? and if she accepted him she would be sultana. The idea was dazzling at a distance, but even to her romance-loving brain there was something theatrical when it was looked at with the eyes of common sense.

She could not accept him. It was absurd; and after all, perhaps he had no such idea as that in coming. It was, as her father thought, some matter of business, such as he had been in the habit of visiting her father about over and over again, and such as had resulted in the intimacy which made him a welcome guest at the house.

She thought differently, however; and though she assumed surprise, she was in nowise startled when her father returned.

“I say, Nelly!” he exclaimed, looking annoyed, and completely off his balance, “what the dickens have you been about?”

“About, papa?” said the girl, raising her eyebrows, “I don’t understand you!”

“Then the sooner you do the better! I’ve quite enough to worry me without your foolery! Here’s the Rajah come to see me on business.”

“Very well, papa, I don’t understand business,” she said, quietly.

“But you’ll have to understand it!” he cried, angrily. “Here, he says that you have been giving him permission to

“speak to me; and as far as I can understand him, he proposes for your hand!”

“The Rajah, papa! Oh! absurd!”

“Oh, yes, it’s absurd enough, confound his copper-coloured insolence! But it puts me in a fix with him. If I offend him, I shall offend his people, or he’ll make them offended, and I shall be a heavy loser. Did you tell him to speak to me?”

“Certainly not, papa!”

“Perhaps I misunderstood him, for he speaks horrible English. But whether or no, he proposes that you shall be his wife.”

“His wife, papa! Why, he has a dozen!”

“Yes, my dear, of course; but then these fellows don’t take that into consideration. What the deuce am I to do?”

“Tell him it is an insult to an English lady to propose such a thing!” said Helen, haughtily.

“Yes, that’s easily said; but you must have been leading the fellow on.”

“He was your guest, papa, and I was civil to him,” said Helen, coldly.

“A deal too civil, I’ll be bound! I’m sick of your civilities, Nell, and their consequences! Why can’t you get engaged like any other girl? I wish to goodness you were married and settled!”

“Thank you, papa,” she replied in the same cold, indifferent manner.

“Yes, but this fellow’s waiting to see you. What am I to say.”

“What are you to say, papa? Really you ought to know!”

“But it’s impossible for you to accept him, though he is very rich.”

“Quite impossible, papa!”

“Then he’ll be offended.”

“Well, papa, that is not of much consequence.”

“But it is of consequence—of great consequence! Don’t I tell you it will cause me serious loss; and besides that, it is dangerous to affront a fellow like this. He is only a nigger, of course, but he is a reigning prince, and has great power. He’s as proud as Lucifer; and if he considers that he is affronted, there’s no knowing what may be the consequences.”

“He may carry me off perhaps, papa,” said Helen, showing her white teeth.

“Well, I wouldn’t say that he might not attempt it!”

“Like a baron of old,” said the girl scornfully. “Papa, I am not a child! How can you be so absurd?”

“You can call it what you like,” he said angrily; “but your folly has got us into a pretty mess. Well, you must go in and see him.”

“I? Go in and see him?” cried Helen, flushing. “Impossible, papa!”

“But it is not impossible. I told him I didn’t know what to say till I had seen you, and, what was the perfect truth, that I was quite taken by surprise. Now the best thing will be for you to go in and see him and temporise with him. Don’t refuse him out and out, but try and ease him off, as one may say. Gain time, and the fellow will forget all about it in a month or two.”

“Papa!”

“Ah, you may say—*papa*; but you have got me into a terrible muddle, and now you must help to get me out of it. I must not have this fellow offended. Confound the insolent scoundrel! Just like the savage. He learns to wear English clothes, and then thinks he is a gentleman, and insults us with this proposal.”

“Yes; insults us papa: that is the word!” cried Helen, with spirit.

“Well, time’s flying, and he is waiting, so go and see him at once, and get it over.”

“But I tell you, papa, I cannot. It is impossible!”

“Why, you were talking to him for long enough last night in the drawing-room. Now, come, Helen, don’t be ridiculous, but go and do as I tell you; and the sooner it is done the better.”

Helen Perowne pressed her lips tightly together, and a look came into her face that betokened obstinate determination of the straightest kind.

“Papa, you make matters worse,” she cried, “by proposing such a degrading task to me. This man is, as you say, little better than a savage. His proposal is an insult, and yet you wish me to go and see him. It is impossible!”

"Don't I tell you that I have business arrangements with the fellow, and that I can't afford to lose his custom? And don't I tell you that, situated as we are here amongst these people, it is not wise to make them our enemies. I don't want you to snub him. It is only for prudential reasons. Now, come; get it over."

"I cannot see him! I will not see him!" cried Helen, passionately; and she turned pale now at the idea of encountering the passionate young Malay. For the moment she bitterly regretted her folly, though the chances are that if circumstances tended in that direction she would have behaved again in precisely the same way.

"Now look here, Nelly," said Mr Perowne, "you must see him!"

For answer she paused for a moment, and then walked straight to the door.

"That's right," he said. "Temporise with him a bit, my dear, and let him down gently."

Helen stood with the door in her hand, and darted at him an imperious look; then she passed through, and the door swung to behind her.

"Confound him! What insolence!" muttered Mr Perowne, as he stood listening. "Eh? No; she wouldn't dare! Why, confound the girl, she has gone up to her room and locked herself in! What a temper she has got to be sure!"

He gave his head a vicious rub, and then, evidently under the impression that it was in vain to appeal again to his child, he snapped his teeth together sharply, and walked firmly into the drawing-room, where the Rajah stood impatiently waiting his return.

The young eastern prince was most carefully dressed; his morning coat and trousers being from a West-end tailor, and his hands were covered with the tightest of lemon-coloured gloves. In one hand was a grey tall hat, in the other the thinnest of umbrellas. Altogether his appearance was unexceptionable, if he had dispensed with the gaudy silken sarong ablaze with a plaid of green, yellow, and scarlet.

His thick lips were wreathed in a pleasant smile, and his dark, full eyes were half closed; but they opened widely for an instant, and seemed to emit anger in one flash, as he saw that Mr Perowne came back alone.

"Where—is—miss?" he said, in a slow, thick tone.

"Well, the fact is, Rajah," said Mr Perowne, giving a laugh to clear his throat, "I have seen my daughter, and she asked me to tell you that she is suffering from a bad headache. You understand me?"

The young Rajah nodded, his eyes seeming to contract the while.

"She is of course very much flattered by your proposal—one which she says she will think over most carefully; but she is so surprised, that she can only ask you to give her time. I see you understand me?"

The Rajah nodded again in a quick, eager way.

"English girls do not say *yea* all at once to a proposal like yours; and if you will wait a few months—of course being good friends all the time—we shall be able to speak more about the subject."

Mr Perowne, merchant, and man of the world, meant to say all this in a quick, matter-of-fact, frank way, but he stumbled, and spoke in a halting, lame fashion, growing more and more unsatisfactory as the young Malay prince came closer to him.

"I—I think you understand me," he said, feeling called upon to say something, as the Malay glared at him as if about to spring.

"Yes—yes!" hissed the Malay. "Lies—all lies! I came for friend. You mock—you laugh in my face—but you do not know. I say I came for friend—I go away—enemy!"

He went on speaking rapidly in the Malay tongue, his rage seeming to be the more concentrated from the cold, cutting tone he adopted. Then, nearly closing his eyes, and giving his peculiar type of features a crafty, cat-like aspect, he gazed furiously at the merchant for a few minutes, and then turned, and seemed to creep from the house in a way that was as feline as his looks.

Volume One—Chapter Twenty One.

Taking Alarm.

Mr Perowne drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the dew from his forehead.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated, "they assassinated poor Rodrick, and here is that girl only home for a few weeks, and a shock like this to come upon me! Surely I've troubles enough on hand without a worry like this!"

He walked to the window and saw the Malay prince entering his boat by the landing-place, where it was pushed off and pulled into mid-stream by a dozen stout rowers.

"The man's mad with passion," muttered Mr Perowne. "I would not have had it happen for all I possess. Women always were at the bottom of every bit of mischief, but I did not expect Helen would begin so soon."

He had another look at the Rajah's handsome boat, which took the place of a carriage in that roadless place, and saw that the Malay prince had turned and was gazing back.

"I don't know what's to be the end of all this, and—Oh, Harley! is that you? Come in."

The Resident, looking rather troubled and anxious, came in through the veranda, gazing sharply at Mr Perowne.

"What has the Rajah been here for this morning?"

"What has he been here for?" cried Mr Perowne, angrily, and glad of someone upon whom he could let off a little of his rage. "Why, to do what you ought to have done in a downright way. I gave you leave, and you have done nothing but play with her."

"He has not been to propose for Helen's hand?"

"Indeed, but he has."

"How unfortunate! I did not know that matters had gone so far as that?"

"Nor I neither. I knew she was flirting a bit, confound her. Did you meet him?"

"Yes, and he would not speak. I saw something was wrong from his savage manner."

"Perhaps he thought you had come up to propose, eh? Had you?"

"Not exactly," said the Resident, looking very serious.

"Because if you had, you ought to have come before," said Mr Perowne, biting his nails.

"I came to remonstrate with Helen, after seeing Mrs Bolter this morning."

"Hang Mrs Bolter for a meddling little fool," cried the merchant.

"She drew my attention to the serious dangers that might ensue if Helen led this man on. I ought to have foreseen it, but I did not, and that's the most troublous part of it. I ought to have known better," cried the Resident, biting his lips.

"Oh, it's very easy to talk," said Mr Perowne, whose previous night's blandness seemed to be quite gone, to leave a weak, querulous childishness in its place.

"Knowing what I do of the Malay character, Perowne, I ought to have watched her, but I confess I was so wrapped up in my own feelings that I did not think."

"I thought you wanted to marry her, I gave you my consent at once. I told you nothing would please me better," continued the father, querulously; "but ever since you both landed you seem to have done nothing but shilly-shally."

"Don't talk like that, Perowne," said the Resident, impatiently. "A man does not take a wife like you make a bargain. I want to win her love as well as have her hand."

"And you hang back—I've seen you—and let these other fellows cut you out. Hilton and Chumbley, and then this Rajah. I say—I must say, Harley, it is much too bad."

"Yes, yes, I have done as you say; but I had a reason for it, Perowne, I had indeed; but I find I can manage natives better than a beautiful girl. If I had foreseen—"

"If I had foreseen it," cried Perowne, interrupting, "I'd have had her kept in England. Confound the girl!"

"It never occurred to me," said the Resident, "though it ought, that danger might arise from her flirtations."

"Danger! Why I shall lose thousands!" cried Perowne. "The fellow will never forgive me, and throw endless obstacles in my way with his people."

"Helen refused him, of course?" said the Resident.

"Of course—of course," said the merchant, pettishly.

"I blame myself deeply for not being more observant," said the Resident. "Others have seen what I failed to see, and it was always so. Lookers-on see most of the game; but I am awake to the danger now."

"Danger? danger?" said Perowne, looking up now in a startled way. "Do you think there is danger? I hope not; but we ought to be prepared. What do you think it will be best to do?"

"See Hilton, and tell him to double all guards; fill your revolver with cartridges; and be always on the alert. We must make no show of begin in danger, but go on as usual, while reinforcements are quietly sent for from Singapore."

"Do—do you think it will be as bad as that?"

"Worse, for aught I know," said the Resident, bitterly. "That fellow, with all his smoothness and French polish, may turn out, now he is thwarted, a perfect demon. Perowne, we have contrived to make him our bitterest foe."

"But—but it couldn't be helped, Harley," said Perowne, in an apologetic tone. "Helen could not—"

"Suppose you leave Miss Perowne's name out of the question, Mr Perowne," said the Resident, sternly. "I'll go on and see Hilton now, and we must do the best we can."

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Two.

Mrs Bolter at Home.

It cannot be denied that Mrs Bolter's mature little heart had developed, with an intense love and admiration of her lord, a good deal of acidity, such as made her jealous, exacting, and tyrannical to a degree.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the doctor was unhappy. Quite the contrary; he seemed to enjoy his tyrant's rule, and to go on peaceably enough, letting her dictate, order, and check him at her own sweet will.

"There's no doubt about it," chuckled the little doctor to himself, "she's as jealous as Othello, and watches me like an—an—an—well—say eagle," he said, quite at a loss for a simile. "I don't mind, bless her! Shows how fond she has grown; and I suppose it must be worrying to the dear little woman to have first one and then another lady sending for me. I don't wonder at her asking me what they wanted. I shouldn't like it if gentlemen were always sending for her."

Dr Bolter had been indulging in a similar strain to this, when, after making up a few quinine powders in his tiny surgery, he went into the room where his little wife was in conversation with her brother.

"Ah, Arthur!" said the doctor, "how are you getting on with folks?"

"Very pleasantly," said the chaplain, smiling. "I find everybody kind and genial."

"That's right," said the doctor, rubbing his hands and smiling at his wife, who frowned at him severely, and then let her pleasant face break up in dimples. "I want you both to enjoy the place. Don't be afraid of visiting. They like it. Stir them up well, and make yourself quite at home with everybody. This isn't England."

"No," said the Reverend Arthur, smiling; "I find the difference."

"I say, old boy," continued the doctor, "I was in the fort yesterday, talking to some of the men. They say they like your preaching."

"I am very glad, Harry," said the chaplain, simply. "I was afraid that I was rather wandering sometimes in my discourse."

"No, no; just what they like, old fellow! Simple and matter of fact. What they can understand. Going?"

"Yes; I am going across to see Mr Harley."

"Ah! do. Good fellow, Harley! Don't make any mistakes though, and step into the river instead of the sampan."

"Is there any danger, Henry?" exclaimed Mrs Doctor, sharply.

"Not the least, my dear; only Arthur here is a little dreamy sometimes."

"I'd go with him," said Mrs Bolter decidedly, "only I want to talk to you, Henry."

"Phee-ew!" whistled the doctor, softly, "here's a breeze coming;" and he looked furtively at his wife to see what she meant.

She walked with her brother to the door, bade him be careful, and then returned.

"Now look here, Dr Bolter," she said severely, "I am the last woman in the world to find fault, but I am your wife."

"You are, my dear Mary, and the very, very best of wives!"

"That's base flattery, sir," said the little lady, who, however, looked pleased.

"Flattery? No! One never flatters one's wife."

"How do you know, sir?" cried Mrs Bolter, sharply.

"From what one reads, Mary. I never had a wife before; and I never flatter you."

"No, sir, but you try something else; and I tell you I will not submit to be imposed upon!"

"I'm sure, my dear, I never impose upon you."

"Indeed, sir; then what is this you propose doing? Why do you want to go away for three days?"

"Collecting, my dear."

"Without Arthur? Now look here, Bolter, the very fact of your wanting to go collecting without Arthur, whom you always talk about as being a brother naturalist, looks suspicious."

"Indeed, my dear, I do want to go collecting."

"Collecting? Rubbish!"

"No, my dear, it is not. I'm afraid you will never realise the value of my specimens."

"You are going collecting, then?" said Mrs Doctor.

"Yes, my dear."

"Without Arthur?"

"Yes; he does not get on very well in the jungle; and he is rather awkward in a boat."

"Then I shall go with you myself," said the little lady, decidedly.

"You—you go with me, Mary," he said, staring.

"Yes, certainly."

"But the thorns, and mud, and heat, and mosquitoes, my dear?"

"If they will not hurt you, Henry, they will not hurt me," said the little lady.

"But they would hurt you, my dear. Of course I should like to have you, but it would be impossible! I shall only be away three days."

"But the place is full of old stones and skins that smell atrociously, and wretched flies and beetles with pins stuck through their bodies, and I'm sure I can't think why you want more."

"For the learned societies in London, my dear. You forget that I am a corresponding member to several."

"Oh, no, I don't," said Mrs Bolter. "I don't forget that you make it an excuse for sitting up all night smoking and drinking cold whiskey and water, sir, because you have writing to do instead of coming to bed."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear," he said, "you would be a perfect woman if you only cared for science."

"You never said a word to me, sir, about caring for science when I consented to come out with you to this dreadful, hot, damp place, where everything that does not turn mouldy is eaten by ants."

"The damp and the ants are great nuisances, my dear," said the doctor. "They have destroyed numbers of my best specimens."

"They have destroyed my beautiful piano that I was foolish enough to bring out," said Mrs Bolter. "Grey Stuart opened it yesterday, and the damp has melted the glue, and the ants have eaten up all the leather of the hammers. The wires are rusty, and the instrument is totally spoiled."

"Never mind, my dear, so long as the climate does not affect your constitution," said the doctor, cheerfully.

"Oh, by the way," said Mrs Bolter, "that reminds me of two things. First of all, Bolter, I will not have you so fond of talking to the young ladies at the dinner parties to which we go. You remember what I said to you about your conduct with Miss Morrison?"

"Yes, my dear, perfectly," said the doctor, with a sigh.

"Secondly, about medicine. Now, it is of no use for you to deny it, for I feel as sure as can be that you have been giving me some medicine on the sly these last few days."

"Why, my darling!" cried the doctor.

"It is of no use for you to put on that injured expression, Henry, because I know; and mind this, I don't accuse you of trying to poison me, but of trying experiments with new-fangled drugs, and I tell you I won't have it."

The doctor protested his innocence, but the lady was not convinced; and apparently under the impression that it would be as well to submit, he allowed her to go on till she reached the top of her bent, when she suddenly changed the topic.

"Ah, there was something else I wanted to say to you," she said sharply. "How about Helen Perowne?"

This was too much for the doctor's equanimity, and he gave the table a bang with his fist.

"I declare it's too bad," he exclaimed, wrathfully now. He had submitted to all that had been said before with a few protestations and shrugs of the shoulders, but now he fired up. "I have never hardly said a civil word to the girl in my life, for I protest that I utterly detest the handsome, heartless, coquettish creature. Of all the unjust women I ever met, Mary, you are about the worst."

A casual observer would have set Mrs Doctor Bolter down as an extremely prejudiced, suspicious woman of a highly-

jealous temperament; but then a casual observer would not have known her real nature.

If he had seen her now, as she sank back in her chair, and the pleasant dimples and puckers came into her face, he would have understood much better how it was that the doctor had persuaded her to leave her maiden state to come and share his lot.

For as the doctor turned redder in the face and then purple, she smiled and shook a little round white finger at him.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser," she said. "I never accused you, sir, of flirting with Helen Perowne; but as soon as I mentioned her name you began to defend yourself."

"I don't care," cried the doctor, "I confess I have said complimentary and pleasant things to all the ladies of the station, both old and young; not that they think anything of it, for I'm only the doctor; while as to Helen Perowne, last time her father asked me to see and prescribe for her, and she began to make eyes at me, and put forth her blandishments—"

"Oh, you confess that, sir?"

"Confess it?" cried the doctor, stoutly. "Why she does that to every man she sees! I believe if her father took her to Madame Tussaud's—You remember my taking you to Madame Tussaud's, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Mrs Bolter.

"Well, I honestly believe that if she were taken there she'd begin making eyes at the wax figures."

"Indeed!" said Mrs Bolter, stiffly. "And so she began to make eyes at you!"

"That she did, the jade," said the doctor, chuckling, "and—and—ha, ha, ha—ho, ho, ho! don't—ha, ha, ha!—say a word about it, my dear—there was nothing the matter with her but young girl's whimsical fancies; and she made me so cross with her fads and languishing airs, and then by making such a dead set at me, that I—ha, ha, ha—ho, ho, ho—"

"Bolter," exclaimed Mrs B, "if you confess to me that you kissed her I'll have a divorce—I'll go straight back to England?"

"Kiss her? Not I!—ho, ho, ho!—I gave her such a dose; and I kept her extremely poorly for about a week. She—she hates me like she does physic. Oh, dear me!"

The doctor wiped his eyes, burst into another fit of laughing, and then, after another wipe at his eyes, his face smoothed down and he grew composed.

"Then it's a pity you don't give her another dose of medicine," said his lady, "and prevent her doing so much mischief as she is doing here."

"But really, my dear, you have no right to accuse me of being extra polite to Helen Perowne."

"I did not, and I was not about to accuse you of being extra polite to Helen Perowne—*extra polite*, as you call it, sir; but I was about to connect her name with that of other gentlemen, and not with that of my husband."

"Oh! come, that's a comfort," said the doctor. "What is it then about Helen Perowne?"

"I don't like the way in which she is going on," said Mrs Doctor, "and I am quite sure that no good will come of it. I don't think there is any real harm in the girl."

"Harm? No, I don't think there is," said Dr Bolter. "She's very handsome, and she has been spoiled by flattery."

"Administered by foolish men like someone we know," said the lady.

"H'm! yes—well, perhaps so; but really she is too bad. The fellows seem to run mad after her."

"Did you see her talking to the Rajah last night?"

"Yes, I saw her; and then poor Hilton began to singe his wings in the candle, and next week she will have somebody else. I know what I'd do if I had to prescribe for her."

"And what might that be, sir?"

"I'd prescribe a husband, such a one as Harley—a firm, strong-minded, middle-aged man, who would keep a tight hand at the rein and bring her to her senses. I daresay she'd make a man a good wife, after all."

"Perhaps so," said Mrs Doctor, pursing up her lips; "but meantime, as you are not called upon to prescribe, what is to be done?"

"To be done? Why, nothing."

"Oh! but something must be done, Bolter. You ought to speak to Mr Perowne."

"And be called an idiot for my pains. No, thank you, my dear. In all such delicate matters as these a lady's hand—I should say, tongue—is the instrument to set matters right. Now, I should say the proper thing would be for a quiet,

sensible, clever, middle-aged lady—may I speak of you as a middle-aged lady, my dear—”

“Don’t be stupid, Henry. I’m forty-four, as you well know, and I never pretended to be younger.”

“No, of course not. You fired forty years at me in a platoon when I proposed, like the dear, sensible old darling you are.”

“Tut! Hush! Silence, sir! No more of that, please.”

“All right, my dear. Well, as I was saying, suppose you have a quiet talk to the girl yourself.”

Mrs Bolter knitted her brows and looked very thoughtful.

“I don’t know,” she said. “It might do good, or it might not. I will think about it.”

“And about my going away for three days, my dear.”

“Oh, one moment, Henry,” said Mrs Doctor. “There was something else I wished to ascertain.”

“What, another something else?” groaned the doctor.

“Yes, another something else, sir. You promised me, that if you could not quite check that terrible habit of yours of talking about Ophir and King Solomon, that you would modify it.”

“Yes, my dear,” said the doctor, giving his ear a rub, and accompanying it by a submissive look.

“I heard you last night exciting the ridicule of all the gentlemen by your pertinacious declarations regarding that mythical idea.”

“Don’t say ridicule, my dear.”

“But I do say ridicule, Henry, and I object to having my husband laughed at by ignorant people—he being a very clever man. So be careful in the future. Now you may go.”

“For three days, my dear?”

“Yes; and pray take care of yourself.”

“I will, my darling,” he cried, in delight; and he was about to embrace the lady warmly, when a step was heard in the veranda, and a voice exclaiming:

“May I come in?”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Three.

A Little Cloud.

“Yes; come in Mr Harley,” and the tall, stern-looking Resident entered the room with the free at-home-ness of people living out at a station where circumstances force the Europeans into the closet intimacy.

“Is anything the matter?” exclaimed the doctor’s wife, as she saw his anxious face.

“Well, not yet,” he said; “but I must confess to being a little nervous about something that has happened. Don’t go away, Bolter.”

“Only going to make a few preparations for a run out. Back directly.”

“No, no,” said the Resident; “you would oblige me by staying. I think, Bolter, you will have to give up all thought of going out at present.”

“Then something is the matter!” said the doctor.

“Oh, it isn’t doctor’s work—at present,” said the Resident, smiling. “The fact is, the Rajah has been hanging about Perowne’s place a good deal lately.”

“Yes, we had observed it,” said Mrs Bolter, severely.

“And the foolish fellow seems to think he has had a little encouragement from Miss Perowne.”

Mrs Doctor nodded and tightened her lips as the Resident went on:

“The result is, that he has been to Perowne’s this morning and proposed in due form for her hand.”

“Why, the scoundrel has got about a dozen wives,” cried the doctor.

“Yes, and of course Perowne tried to smooth him down and to soften the disappointment; but he has gone away furious. I have just come from Perowne’s, and I called to put you on your guard.”

"Think there's any danger?" said the doctor, sharply.

"Can't say. You know what these people are if they do not have their own way."

"Yes," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "They can be crafty and cruel enough I know; and they don't love us any better than they did ten years ago, when I was all through the old troubles."

"Of course," said the Resident, "if there should be any threatening of trouble you will come across to the island till it is over. I would not show that we are at all uneasy, doctor; only be upon one's guard."

"Yes," said Mrs Doctor, who had been listening attentively, "that will be best. There may be no trouble over the matter, Mr Harley, and I think we should, as you say, be doing wrong by seeming to be alarmed."

"Then my expedition is quashed for the present," said the doctor, dolefully.

"It can wait, I am sure," said his lady, quietly; and her lord resigned himself to his fate as the Resident repeated his advice about not spreading the alarm and exciting the natives by whom they were surrounded, and then left them to go to the fort on the Residency island—a picturesque little clump of rocky earth that divided the river into two parts. On mounting upon the bamboo landing-stage the first person he encountered was Captain Hilton.

Knowing as he did that the young officer had been very attentive to Helen Perowne of late, he hesitated for a few moments, naturally feeling a repugnance to speak upon such matters to one whom other men would have considered a rival; but after a little thought he laughed to himself.

"I am a fatalist," he muttered, "and I am not afraid. Here, Hilton," he said, aloud, "I want to speak to you. Ah, there's Chumbley, too. Don't take any particular notice," he continued, as he noted that several of the natives were about. "Have a cigar?"

He drew out his case as he spoke, and Lieutenant Chumbley coming sauntering up in his cool, idle way, the case was offered to him, and the three gentlemen went slowly along the well-kept military path towards the little mess-room.

"Anything wrong?" said Captain Hilton, eagerly; and as he spoke the Resident saw his eyes turn in the direction of Mr Perowne's house on the east bank of the river.

"Not at present; but the fact is, I am afraid Mr Perowne has seriously affronted the Rajah this morning, and I think it would be as well to be upon our guard."

"Got any more of these cigars, Harley?" said Chumbley, quietly. "I like 'em."

"For Heaven's sake do hold your tongue, Chumbley!" cried the captain. "I never did see a fellow so cool and indifferent."

"Why not?" replied Chumbley, in his slow drawl. "There's nothing wrong, only that the Rajah has been to Perowne's this morning to propose for the fair Helen, and he has come away with a flea in his ear."

"What?" cried Captain Hilton.

"How did you know?" exclaimed the Resident, turning upon Chumbley, sharply.

"Guessed it—knew it would come from what I saw last night. That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is it," replied the Resident, frowning slightly.

"The insolence—the consummate ignorant audacity!" cried the captain, his face flushing with anger. "The dog! I'll horsewhip him till he begs for mercy!"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Hilton," said the Resident quietly.

"But it is insufferable," cried Hilton. "An ignorant, brown-skinned savage to pretend to place himself on a level with gentlemen, and then to dare to propose for an English lady's hand!"

"Don't be excited, Hilton," said the Resident, looking fixedly in the young officer's handsome, angry countenance. "You forget that the Rajah may look down upon us as his inferiors. He is a prince in his own right, and rules over a very large extent of country here."

"Oh, yes, I know all that," cried Hilton, angrily; "but of course Perowne sent him about his business?"

"Yes, and that is why I have come to you. There may be nothing more heard of the matter; but I think it is quite possible that the Rajah may have taken such dire offence that he will force all his people to join in his quarrel, and the result be a serious trouble."

"I hope not," drawled Chumbley. "I hate fighting."

"Pooh!" ejaculated Hilton. "If the scoundrel gives us any of his insolence, we'll send him handcuffed to Singapore!"

"I should be greatly obliged, Hilton," said the Resident stiffly, "if you would modify your tone a little. For my part, I am not surprised at the Rajah's conduct, and I think that it would be better to let our behaviour towards him be conciliating."

"What! to a fellow like that?" cried the captain.

"To a man like that," said the Resident, gravely. "If he behaves badly we are strong enough to resent it; but if, on the other hand, he cools down and acts as a gentleman would under the circumstances, it is our duty to meet him in the most friendly spirit we can."

"I don't think so," cried Hilton, hotly, "and if the scoundrel comes to me I shall treat him as he deserves."

"Captain Hilton," said the Resident, and his voice was now very grave and stern, "I must ask you to bear in mind that we occupy a very delicate position here—I as her Majesty's representative; and you, with your handful of troops, as my supporters. We are few, living in the midst of many, and we hold our own here, please to recollect, by *prestige*."

"Of course—yes, I know that," said Hilton.

"That *prestige* we shall lose if we let our judgment be biased by personal feeling. Kindly set self on one side, as I am striving to do, and help me to the best of your ability by your manly, unselfish advice."

Hilton frowned as the Resident went on; but the next instant he had held out his hand, which the other grasped.

"I am afraid I am very hot-headed, Mr Harley," he exclaimed. "There, it is all over, and I'll help you to the best of my power. Now then, what's to be done?"

"First accept my thanks," cried the Resident. "I knew that I could count upon you, Hilton."

"I'll do my best, Harley."

"Then stroll quietly back to the barracks, and in a matter-of-fact way see that all is in such order that you could bring up your men at a moment's notice."

"Reinforcements?" suggested Captain Hilton.

"I did think of asking for them," said the Resident, "but on second thoughts it seems hardly necessary. I would do everything without exciting suspicion, and as if you were only inspecting the fort. Now go."

"Right," said the captain; and he walked away, saying to himself:

"He's a good fellow, Harley, that he is, and he does not bear a bit of malice against me for cutting him out. Poor fellow! he must have felt it bitterly. Hang it all! I could not have borne it. The very fact of this fellow proposing for Helen nearly drove me wild. I think if I were to lose her I should die."

Chumbley was about to follow Hilton, but the Resident laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Of course I can count upon your discretion, Chumbley?" he said.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said the young man, "so long as you don't want anything done in a hurry. Nature seems to forbid a man to be scurried in this climate; but I say, Mr Harley, don't let's have a row if you can help it, I'm a soldier, but if there is anything I do abhor, it is fighting. I hate blood. The very idea of having to make our lads use their bayonets gives me a cold chill all down the back."

"Depend upon it we will not have a quarrel with the natives if we can help it, Chumbley. If diplomacy can keep it off, there shall be none;" and nodding his head in a friendly manner to the young officer, he strolled away.

"But diplomacy won't keep it off, my dear sir," said Chumbley. "If Mother Nature turns loose such a girl as Helen Perowne, to play fast and loose with men like Murad, a row must come."

"Let me see," he said, after a pause, "what shall I do with myself to-day? Best way to avoid scrapes is to keep up friendly relations with the natives."

"Oh, what a worry this love-making is! We all go in for it at some time or another, but hang me if I think it pays."

"Little Helen quite hates me now, since I've broken the string and will not be cajoled into coming back. By Jove! what a wise little girl little Stuart is. One might get up a flirtation there without any heart-breaking. No: won't do, she's too sweet, and wise, and sensible. Hang it all, can't a fellow talk sensibly to a pretty girl without thinking he's flirting! I like little Stuart. You can talk to her about anything, and she never giggles and blushes, and looks silly. She's an uncommonly nice young girl, and twenty years hence, when beautiful Helen has grown old, and yellow, and scraggy, Stuart will be a pleasant, soft, amiable little woman, like Mrs Bolter. There's a woman for you! 'Pon my word I believe she likes me; she talks to me just as if I were a big son."

"Well, now, what's to be done? I'll go and see if Hilton wants me, and if he doesn't I shall have a few hours ashore."

"By the way, I wonder who'll marry little Stuart?" he said, as he went slowly on with his hands behind him, his broad chest thrown out, and a bluff, manly bearing about him that would have made an onlooker think that he would not make a bad match for the lady himself.

"I shan't," he added, after a pause. "Hilton's a precious idiot not to go for her himself, instead of wasting his time upon a woman who will throw him over. As for me, I'm beginning to think I am not a lady's man. I'm too big, and clumsy, and stupid. They tolerate me when they don't laugh at me. Bah! what does it matter? Sport's my line—and dogs."

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Four.

The Pains of a Princess.

Captain Hilton saw no reason for detaining his subaltern, only bade him be ready to return to the island at the slightest sign of danger, which Chumbley promised to do; and he was about to walk down to the landing-stage, when, happening to gaze across the swift river towards Mr Perowne's beautiful garden, which sloped down to the water's edge, with as good a semblance of a lawn as could be obtained in that part of the world, he caught sight of a couple of figures in white, walking slowly up and down in the shade of the trees.

He was too far distant to make out their faces, but he had no doubt that the two were Helen and Grey Stuart.

"Now, I would not mind laying a whole shilling that Master Hilton has his binocular focussed exactly upon one of your faces, and is watching every turn of expression. If you smile he thinks it is with thoughts of him; and take it altogether, the poor fellow imagines you are always dreaming of him, when you are wondering what is worn now in Paris or London, and whether any of the new fashions will reach you by the next steamer.

"Yes, that's Helen—fair Helen," he said, leaning upon a rail, and gazing across the water. "Chumbley, old fellow, I'm beginning to think you are not such a fool as I used to imagine you to be. It was a good brave stroke to get away from the toils of that syren; for there's no mistake about it, old man, you were just like a big fly in the pretty spider's web.

"By George! she is a very lovely girl though! She seems to fascinate everyone she comes near. Thank goodness, she only got me by one leg, and I broke out, I hope, without much damaging the net. Certainly she soon seemed to repair it. I wish I were a good prophet," he went on, lighting a cigarette. "I should like to be able to say what is to take place here, who'll marry whom, and who'll remain single. Hullo! what's coming now?"

The splash of oars roused him from his reverie, and turning towards the landing-stage, he made out a dragon-boat, or naga, as the larger row-galleys used by the Malay nobles are called, rapidly approaching the little isle.

It was propelled by a dozen rowers, all dressed uniformly in yellow silk bajus or jackets, their coarse black hair being topped by a natty little cap similar to that worn by a cavalry soldier in undress, and they kept stroke with wonderful accuracy as they forced the boat along.

A large shed-like awning of bamboo and palm leaves covered the latter part of the vessel; and Chumbley forgot his customary inertia, and scanned the boat eagerly, to see if it contained armed men. To his surprise, however, he saw that the whole space beneath the broad awning was filled with women, whose brightly-coloured silken sarongs were hung from their heads after the manner of veils; and though the rowers each wore his kris, the hilt was covered, and it was evidently a friendly visit.

"I don't know though," thought Chumbley. "Perhaps it is a ruse, and instead of women, those are smart youths, well armed, ready to give our fellows a dig with the kris, and take the place by surprise.

"No," he said, after a few moments' pause, for there was no mistaking the object of the visit, the Malays being a particularly religious people, and great sticklers for form and ceremony, to which they adhere with scrupulous exactness, so that any one pretty well versed in their customs would know at a glance at their dress whether their object was friendly or the reverse.

"Why, it must be the Inche Maida," muttered Chumbley, giving the native name to a princess residing some distance higher up the stream. "I ought to have been in full fig. I suppose I must go and receive her as I am."

He threw away his cigarette, turned out the guard, sent a messenger up to the Residency with the news of the Princess's arrival, bidding the man leave word at the officers' quarters as he passed, and then walked down to the landing-stage, just as the dragon-boat, with its carved and gilded prow, was run abreast.

Chumbley courteously raised his muslin-covered pith helmet, tucked it beneath his arm, and helped the Princess to step ashore.

She was a remarkably handsome woman of about thirty, with features of the Malay type, but softened into a nearer approach to beauty than is common amongst the women of this nation, whose prominent lips and dilated nostrils are not compensated by the rich long black hair, and large lustrous dark eyes.

In the case of the Princess there was almost a European cast of feature, and she possessed an imposing yet graceful carriage, which with her picturesque costume and flower-decked hair, made her far from unattractive, in spite of her warm brown skin.

She accepted Chumbley's assistance with a smile that checked the thought in his mind that she was a fine-looking woman; for that smile revealed a set of remarkably even teeth, but they were filed to a particular pattern and stained black.

Chumbley removed his eyes at once from this disfigurement, and let them rest on the magnificent knot of jetty hair, in which were stuck, in company with large gold pins, clusters of a white and odorous jasmine.

He could not help noting, too, the gracefully-worn scarf of gossamer texture, passing from her right shoulder beneath her left arm, and secured by a richly-chased gold brooch of native workmanship. This she removed to set the scarf at liberty, so as to throw over her head to screen it from the sun.

Accustomed to command, she made no scruple in exposing her face to the gaze of men; but as the women who

formed her train alighted, each raised her hands to a level with her temples, and spread the silken sarong she wore over her head, so that it formed an elongated slit, covering every portion of the face but the eyes, and following the Princess in this uncomfortable guise, they took their places ashore.

"I have come to see the Resident," said the Princess, looking very fixedly at Chumbley, and speaking in excellent English. "Will you take me to his presence?"

Chumbley bowed, and he forgot his slow drawl as he said that he would be happy to lead her to the Residency; but felt rather disconcerted as the visitor exclaimed, in a very pointed way:

"I have not seen you before. Are you the lieutenant?"

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you either," he replied, rather liking the visitor's dignified way as he recovered himself; "but I have heard Mr and Miss Perowne talk of the Inche Maida."

"What did they say about me?" she said, sharply.

"That you were a noble lady, and quite a princess."

"Ah!" she replied, looking at him fixedly. "How big and strong you are."

Chumbley stared and tried to find something suitable to reply, but nothing came, and the situation seemed to him so comical that he smiled, and then, as the Princess smiled too, he laughed outright.

"Forgive my laughing," he said, good-humouredly. "I can't help being big; and I suppose I am strong."

"There is the Resident!" said the lady then; and she drew her hand from Chumbley's arm. "Ah! and the captain."

For just then Harley stepped out from the Residency veranda to meet his visitors; and Hilton, who had found time to put on the regimental scarlet and buckle on his sword, came up to make the reception more imposing.

The Princess shook hands in the European fashion, and accepted the Resident's arm, smiling and bowing as if excusing herself to Hilton. Then, declining to enter the house, she took a seat in the broad veranda amongst the Resident's flowers, while her women grouped themselves behind her, letting fall the sarongs they held over their faces now that, with the exception of a single sentry, none of the common soldiers were about to gaze upon their charms.

But for her costume, the Inche Maida would have passed very well for a dark Englishwoman, and she chatted on for a time about the Resident's flowers and her own; about her visits to the English ladies at the station; and the various European luxuries that she kept adding to her home some twenty miles up the river, where she had quite a palm-tree palace and a goodly retinue of slaves.

Both Mr Harley and Hilton knew that there was some special object in the lady's visit; but that was scrupulously kept in the background, while coffee and liqueurs were handed round, the visitors partaking freely of these and the sweetmeats and cakes kept by the Resident for the gratification of his native friends.

"It is nearly a year since you have been to see me Mr Harley," said the lady at last. "When will you come again?"

"I shall be only too glad to come and see you," said the Resident, "I have not forgotten the pleasure of my last journey to your home."

"And you will come too?" said the Princess quickly; and she turned her great dark eyes upon Hilton, gazing at him fixedly the while.

"I—er—really I hardly think I can leave."

"You will not come?" she cried, with an impetuous jerk of the head. "You think I am a savage, and you despise my ways. Mr Harley will tell you I have tried for years to learn your English customs and to speak your language. It is not fair."

"Indeed," cried Hilton, eager to make up for what the visitor evidently considered a slight, "I only hesitated on the score of duty."

"You would not care to come," she said, with the injured look of a spoiled child.

"Indeed I should," exclaimed Hilton, "and I will come."

"You will come?" she cried, with her dark eyes flashing.

"Yes, indeed I will."

She leaned towards him, speaking eagerly:

"I am glad. I like you English. You shall hunt and shoot. There are tigers, and I have elephants. My slaves shall find game, and you shall have my boat to fetch you."

Dark as her skin was, the Resident noticed the red blood mantling beneath it in her cheeks as she spoke eagerly, fixing her eyes upon Hilton as she spoke, and then lowering the lids in a dreamy, thoughtful way.

"Then you will both come?" she said.

"Yes, I promise for both; but we cannot leave the station together," said Mr Harley.

"It is well," she said, smiling; "and you too, lieutenant—you will come and see me? You like to shoot. All Englishmen like to shoot."

"Oh, yes, I'll come," said Chumbley, with his slow, heavy drawl. "I think it would be rather jolly. Yes, I'll come."

She nodded and smiled at him once more, as if he amused her; and Harley noticed that she glanced at Chumbley again and again as the conversation went on, looking at him as if he were some fine kind of animal she thought it would be well to buy at the first opportunity.

All at once, though, she turned sharply upon the Resident, and the object of her visit came out.

"I want you to help me," she said, with an angry flash in her eye. "I am a woman, and I cannot fight, or I would not come to you for help. But you English are just. You have settled in our country, and your Princess says, 'Let there be no cruelty and ill-treatment of the people where you are.' I have seen you for ten years, ever since I became a woman who could think and act; but because I am a woman I am oppressed. Because I will not be his wife Rajah Hamet stops my people's boats, and takes away tin and rice. His people beat my slaves and steal their fruit and fowls. Our lives become suffering, for my people are me. I am not a mother, but they call me mother, and they say, 'See, your children are robbed and beaten; they moisten the dust of the earth with their tears.'"

"Ah! ah! ah! ay! ay!"

The three Englishmen started, for at these words of their Princess the women burst into a piteous wail, and beat their breasts.

"We suffer; I weep with my children," continued the Princess, rising and holding out her hands, as she went on speaking with a natural grace and fiery eloquence. "I grow hot with anger, and I am ready to take my father's kris and limbing and to go out against this coward who oppresses me; but I am a woman, and I should lead my people to death. I cannot do this, but I think and think till the rage grows cold, and my reason comes back, and I say, 'The great Queen loves her people, and she will not have them hurt. Her rulers, and counsellors, and warriors are in our country, and I will go to them and say, See, I am a woman—a princess. I pay you the tribute you ask of me, and I give you love and all I have that you ask. Save me, then, from this man. Teach him that he cannot rob and injure my people, and so beat and injure me—a helpless woman.' Will you do this, or shall I go back to my own place and say, 'The English are brave, but they will not help me? I am a woman, and you and your children must bear your lot.'"

She ceased speaking and crossed her hands humbly upon her breast; but her eyes lit up as she saw that Chumbley—upon whom her words had had a remarkable effect—was watching the Resident keenly, and was evidently eager to speak.

"Princess," said Mr Harley, "I am deeply grieved that you should have to make this appeal. I do not act in a matter of such grave importance as this without asking advice; but that I will do at once, and believe me, if I could help it, you should not wait an hour for redress."

"Not half an hour if I could have my way," cried Chumbley, excitedly. "Princess, I hope we shall soon visit you for some purpose."

She smiled at him again, and nodded her satisfaction; but there was something very grave and earnest in her look as she almost timidly turned to Hilton.

He saw the look, which was one of appeal, and seemed to ask for a reply.

"I, too," he said, "should gladly come to your assistance."

"Then my task is done," she said. "Mr Harley, pray give me your help, and my people shall be ready should evil days come, as they did when I was a mere girl, and the English were in peril of their lives."

"Princess, I will do my best," he replied; and at a sign from their lady the women rose and stood ready to follow her back to her boat.

"Good-bye," she said, simply, and she held out her hand, placing it afterwards upon Captain Hilton's arm, as if she wished him to escort her down to the landing-stage.

This he did, followed by Chumbley, and on reaching the boat the rowers leaped to their places with the alacrity of well-drilled and disciplined men.

The Princess stood aside till the last of her attendants was in her place, and then she turned to Hilton.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye, Princess," he replied, shaking her hand. "I hope we shall have orders to come to your help."

"So do I," cried Chumbley, as he took the Princess's hand in turn; and as he uttered his earnest words he involuntarily raised her hand to his lips and kissed it with profound respect.

The Inche Maida's eyes flashed as she glanced at him, but they turned directly after with rather a regretful look at

Hilton, as she seated herself beneath the awning. Then giving a signal with her hand, the rowers' paddles dipped, the swift boat darted out into the stream, was deftly turned, and began to ascend rapidly; the two young men standing upon the stage where the guard had presented arms, both of them a good deal impressed.

"I say, old fellow," cried Chumbley, speaking with animation, "that's an uncommonly fine woman, in spite of her coffee skin."

"Yea; you seemed to think so," replied Hilton, laughing.

"Did I?" said Chumbley, with his eyes fixed on the retreating boat.

"Yes; I never saw you so polite to a woman before."

"Didn't you? Well, but she is in trouble, poor thing; and I say, hang it all, old man, how well she spoke out about her people—her children, and her wrongs."

"Yes, it seems very hard, especially as I don't think Harley will get instructions to interfere on her behalf."

"Not interfere!" cried Chumbley. "Then it will be a damned shame. My dear old man, if we don't get orders to dress that fellow down, I'll go up and see her myself, and instead of tiger-hunting I'll try if I can't punch the blackguard's head."

"Why, Chumbley, old boy, what's the matter with you!" cried Hilton, laughing.

"Matter? With me? Nothing at all."

"But you seem all on fire to go and help the Princess."

"Well, of course," said the lieutenant, warmly; "and so I would any woman who was in distress. Why, hang it all, a fellow isn't worth much who wouldn't run some risks to protect a woman."

"Hear! hear! Bravo! bravo! Why Chumbley, you improve."

"Stuff! nonsense!" cried the latter, ashamed of his warmth.

"Stuff if you like, and prime stuff," rejoined Hilton. "It's the sort of stuff of which I like to see men made. I have hopes of you yet, Chumbley. You will turn ladies' man—grow smooth and refined."

"And use a pouncet-box, eh?"

"No; I draw the line at the pouncet-box and silk," laughed Hilton.

"Never mind! Chaff as much as you like, I'd go and help that Inche Maida. By Jove! what a name for a woman?"

"Yes, it is a name for such a fine Cleopatra of a princess. I say, Chum, she seems to have taken quite a fancy to you."

"To me, eh? Well, I like that! Oh, come!" laughed Chumbley. "Why, I saw her lay her hand upon your arm as if she wanted it to stay there. I'll swear I saw her squeeze your hand. No, my boy, it was your Hyperion curls that attracted her ladyship."

"But I'll vow I saw her take a lot of notice of you, Chum."

"Yes, but it was because I looked so big; that was all, lad. She's a sort of hen Frederick William of Prussia, who would adore a regiment of six-feet-six grenadiers. But never mind that; I think she ought to be helped."

"Yes," said Hilton, quietly; "but I wish it was Murad who had done the wrong, for then I think that I should feel as warm as you—Well, what is it?"

"Mr Harley wishes to see you directly, sir," said an orderly.

"Come along, Chumbley; there's news, it seems. What is it, Harley?" he continued, as they joined the Resident in the veranda.

"I have just had news from a man I can trust. Murad is getting his people together, and I fear it means trouble."

"Let it come, then," said Hilton, firmly. "I'm rather glad."

"Glad!" said the Resident, sternly; "and with all these women and children under our charge!"

"I was not thinking of them," said Hilton, warmly, "but of chastising a scoundrel who seems determined to be thrashed."

"I hope he'll bring the other fellow too," said Chumbley.

"Hilton—Chumbley!" said the Resident, sternly. "You think upon the surface. You do not realise what all this trouble means!"

Lieutenant Chumbley's Thoughts.

The news received by Mr Harley had no following. Sultan Murad had undoubtedly gathered his people together, but as events proved, it was not to make a descent upon the station.

But all the same, the conduct of the young Malay prince augmented the scare amongst the Europeans. Grey Stuart grew pale, and thought with feelings of horror of what might be the consequences of her schoolfellow's folly. Helen, too, was in no slight degree alarmed, and the effect of the incident was to sober her somewhat for the time; but as the days glided on and nothing happened, the dread faded away like one of the opalescent mists that hung above the silver river at early morn.

"It is all nonsense," said Mr Perowne; "the *prestige* of the English is too great for this petty rajah to dare to attempt any savage revenge."

"Hah, you think so, do you?" said old Stuart, in his most Scottish tones. "I never knew a tiger hesitate to bite or a serpent to sting because the pairson near him was an Englishman. Ye'll hae to tak' care o' yon lassie o' yours, Perowne, or she'll get us into sad meeschief."

"If Mr Stuart would kindly direct his attention to the instruction of his own daughter, papa, I am sure he would find his hands full," said Helen, in a haughty, half-contemptuous tone, as she crossed the soft carpet unheard.

"Oh, ye're there are ye, lassie?" said the old Scot. "Weel, I'll tell ye that my Grey kens how to behave, and don't go throwing herself at the head of every gentleman she meets; and for your own sake, lassie, I wish your poor mither was alive."

Helen raised her eyes and looked at him for some moments with an angry, disdainful stare of resentment.

"Eh, ye've got bonnie een, lassie, verra bonnie een; but I'd a deal rather see my Grey's little wax tapers burning softly than those dark brimstone matches of yours ready to set every puir laddie's heart ablaze."

"Is this your friend, papa?" cried Helen; and she swept from the room.

"Yes, lassie," said the old Scot, wiping his eyes after laughing at his own conceit. "Yes, I'm ye'r father's best friend, lassie; am I not, Perowne?"

"Yes, yes, of course," said the merchant; "but you should not talk to her like that, Stuart."

"And why not?" said the old man. "Are we to let her go on setting fire to trains all over the place, and trying to get us blown in the air?"

"Nonsense, nonsense! These fellows have sense enough to know what they may do and what they may not."

"Oh, yes, they've plenty of sense," agreed the old Scotch merchant.

"And they won't forget in a hurry how we punished the other rajahs for their treacherous rising against the British power."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," said the old man; "but Murad will not forget this insult to his pride, and I insist, Perowne, upon your keeping a tighter rein over that lassie."

Mr Perowne seemed disposed to resist, but he ended by promising that he would; and after a certain number of discussions in various houses, the cessation of all further proceedings, and a certain amount of worry consequent upon the apprehended danger, the old state of affairs began once more to prevail.

The last to hold out was Mrs Doctor Bolter, who exercised a great deal of watchfulness over her husband and brother, sending one after the other at the most incongruous times.

So peace was once more settling down over Sindang, which rapidly began to resume its dreamy state, the only busy thing about the place being the river, which rapidly flowed onward towards the sea.

The three ladies had grown somewhat accustomed to the sleepy life that nature compelled them to live in a land where, saving at early morn and at evening, any employment was only to be carried out by an extreme effort of will that very few there cared to exercise.

A delicious, drowsy, lotus-eating life it seemed; and as Helen Perowne and Grey Stuart sat beneath the shade of one of the delicious flower-bearing trees inhaling the cloying scents, and watching the eternal sparkle of the beautiful river, they could not help comparing it with their existence at the Miss Twettenhams' school.

Tropic flowers, luscious fruits were there in profusion. Every day seemed to bring those of richer and rarer kinds. The garden was lush with a profusion of choice plants such as could only be produced in the hottest houses at home; and Grey was fain to confess that in spite of the heat it was a lovely land.

Just as everyone had concluded, there had not been the slightest cause for alarm, so they said.

Still the alarm had been excusable, living as they were, a mere handful of strangers, amongst a people well known for their volcanic nature and quickness at taking offence, this latter being acknowledged by the Rajah himself, who completed the calm by coming in semi-state to the Residency island to ask Mr Harley to make intercession for him with the Perownes.

"I am wiser now," he said, with a smile, "and I want to make amends."

This was said so frankly that, however suspicious he may have felt at heart, the Resident at once accepted the task of intercessor.

"I try so hard to be English in my ways," said the young man, "but it takes a long time to forget one's old customs. As I used to be, I had everything I asked for directly; I had only to say that I wanted this, or that I would have that, and I had it at once. But it is so different with you English. You always seem to be denying yourselves things you wish for, and think it great and good."

"Well, we do think it a virtue," said the Resident, smiling.

"I was very angry when Mr Perowne spoke to me as he did, and all my English education went away like a flash of a firefly in the night, and I was a savage once more; but when I got back and thought, then I saw that I had been mad, and I was grieved, for the English are my friends."

"Ah, well," said Mr Harley, "that is all over now. I undertake to put matters right with Mr Perowne; but to be frank with you, Rajah—"

"Yes, that is right, be frank. That is what I like in an Englishman, he is frank and open. A Malay lets his secret thoughts be known—never."

"I say, my friend," exclaimed the Resident, laughing, "I hope that is not the case here."

"Oh, no, no, no!" exclaimed Murad. "Do I not tell you I am English, and that I try to be like you."

"To be sure, yes," said Mr Harley. "Well, then, look here, I do not undertake to make you such friends as you wish to be with Miss Perowne."

"You know all then?" said the Rajah, quickly.

"Her father told me."

"Yes; you are his friend and counsellor; he would tell you of course. No; I do not expect that. I was mad and foolish just then. I know, of course, that you whites would not ally yourselves with us. We are a dreaming nation, and I had dreamed of her love and being happy with her amongst my people, making our alliance greater with you, but it was a dream. I am awake now, and it is past."

"I don't trust you, Master Murad," said the Resident to himself; "but it is the best policy to seem to believe, and to try and make you friends with us again, so I will undertake your commission."

"Look here," he said aloud, "suppose you come across with me to Mr Perowne's house?"

"Oh, no," said the young Malay, shrinking back, "I should see her."

"Very well; and if you do, what then? Come: you say you want to be English. Behave, then, now like an Englishman, taking your disappointment bravely, and let the lady see that you bear it with the calmness and consideration of a man."

"I will come," said the Rajah, eagerly; and he accompanied the Resident across the branch of the river to Mr Perowne's handsome house, where the little explanation took place, and all parted the best of friends.

The Rajah was evidently extremely eager to make amends for the burst of temper he had displayed, and presents of fruit, flowers, and the other productions of the country were constantly arriving by his servants. In some instances, so as to check any excuse that there might be for refusing or looking upon the presents as being pressed upon the English residents, the gifts were accompanied by requests for some little European luxury or for the loan of some article; so that if the Rajah had it in his mind to allay suspicion, he was pretty successful, and matters went on as they were before. Dr Bolter went upon a three days' expedition, which, on account of the difficulties of the country, extended to six days, and he was forgiven.

The Resident sent a despatch to the Governor respecting the Inche Maida's case, and the Governor sent back a despatch to say that he had referred the matter to the Colonial Office; and the end of the piece of red tape was handed to the Malay Princess, who replied that she was willing to wait patiently for redress.

Then there was a pause, and life at the little station seemed to flow on as calmly as the river; but like the river, with its terrible reptiles lurking beneath the treacherously-smooth surface, so were there dangers beneath the calmly-flowing life of the British residents at the station, though they, prone as they were to take alarm, knew nothing, suspected nothing of what was in store.

A month had passed since the little explosion of the Malay volcano, as Chumbley called it. There had been dinners and evening meetings, and the Rajah had been invited to several; then Mr Harley invited nearly everyone to a picnic down the river in his dragon-boat—a party that was pronounced delightful.

This inspired the Rajah to imitate the Resident's little party, and he sought out Chumbley and proposed to get up one on a more extensive scale, and take the party up the beautiful river as far as the rapids.

"I don't mind helping you," said Chumbley, "but it will be an awful lot of trouble, and precious hot."

He finished, however, by saying he would help, and being once roused, threw himself heart and soul into the matter, especially as the Rajah came the next morning to say that he had had a visit from the Inche Maida, who, on being told of the projected party, had proposed that the boats should pass up the river as far as her home, where she would have a Malay banquet prepared.

This was agreed to, and the arrangements went on, it being considered advisable to do all that was possible to conciliate the native chiefs; and on the appointed day the Rajah's two largest dragon-boats, with the rowers all in yellow satin jackets—the royal colour—were at the landing-place of the station, and the Residency island.

The embarkation was soon effected, and the merry party were being rapidly pulled along the light reaches of the winding river, whose clear waters flashed in the bright sunshine, while the verdure-covered banks were rich with a profusion of the gayest blossoms, some of which emitted a delicious scent, plainly observable upon the boats.

Helen Perowne looked handsomer than ever in a dress of the palest yellow silk, half hidden by artistic drapings of lace.

Captain Hilton was always at her side; while Chumbley, when he did rouse himself, tried to be a little attentive to Grey Stuart, who was in company with Mrs Bolter.

The latter lady was a good deal exercised in mind, consequent upon the Reverend Arthur insisting upon bringing his collecting-box, and the doctor his gun; and also because, when the latter was not chatting with the ladies of the party, he was constantly finding out that such and such a woody point would be a splendid place for being set ashore, as the forest abounded with birds and insects rich in nature's brightest dyes.

The Rajah was the perfection of gallantry and politeness, treating Helen Perowne with a grave courtesy whenever he approached her; and all was going on in a most satisfactory style, when Chumbley, who had made his way to the back of the palm-leaf awning that sheltered the party in the boat from the torrid sun, waited his opportunity, and then beckoned to the doctor.

The latter stopped until Mrs Bolter's eyes were in another direction, and then stole behind the awning to where Chumbley was seating himself, with his back against the side of the boat, the steersman looking at his great proportions with admiration the while.

"What is it, Chumbley?" said the doctor. "Not poorly, eh?"

"Never better in my life, doctor! Come and have a cigar."

The doctor glanced forward, but they were completely hidden from sight; and with a sigh of satisfaction, he took a cigar from Chumbley's case, lit it, and choosing a comfortable place, seated himself. Then like the lieutenant, he half closed his eyes, and enjoyed the delicious motion of the rippling water with the glorious panorama of foliage they passed.

"I say, steersman, have a cigar?" said Chumbley, to the tall, swarthy Malay, in his picturesque yellow satin dress.

The man did not understand his words, but he quite comprehended the act; and he showed his betel-stained teeth as he took the proffered cigar, and lit it from the one the lieutenant placed in his hands.

Then they went on and on, up glorious reach after reach of the river, startling reptiles on the banks, and bright-hued birds from the trees that overhung the stream.

"I say, doctor," said Chumbley at last, in his lazy drawl, "what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking that it can't be long before my wife comes and finds me out."

There was a pause, during which Chumbley laughed to himself.

"What are you thinking about, Chumbley?" said the doctor, suddenly.

Chumbley looked up suddenly at the steersman.

"Do you understand any English at all, old fellow?" he said; and the man shook his head.

"I was thinking, doctor," said Chumbley, in a low voice, "what a go it would be if the Rajah has got us all in this boat here, and is taking us up the river never to come back any more."

"What, on account of that upset a month ago?"

"Yes."

"Murder!" ejaculated the doctor.

"Yes," said Chumbley, "for us men; but I think I should be more sorry for the other sex."

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Six.

Up the River.

Doctor Bolter nearly let fall the cigar he was smoking, for his jaw suddenly dropped; but by a clever snatch of the hand he caught it, and replaced it in his lips, as he glanced at the showily-dressed steersman to see if he had noticed the display of agitation.

"I say, Chumbley, don't be a stupid," he said, in a low voice, as he brushed some of the cigar-ash from his white linen tunic.

"Certainly not," replied the lieutenant, coolly. "I only said what I thought."

"But you don't think such a thing as that possible, do you?"

"Don't know. Can't say. It's rather awkward out here, though, to be in a place where you can't call in the police if you want them."

"Dear me! Bless my soul!" ejaculated the doctor, taking his cigar in his hand, and looking at the burning end. "But, oh, no! it's all nonsense. He wouldn't dare to do such a thing."

"No," drawled Chumbley; "I don't suppose he would."

"Then why the dickens did you put forth such an idea?" cried the doctor, angrily. "Bah! that's the worst cigar I ever smoked."

He threw it over the side, and it gave an angry hiss as it fell into the water.

"Try another, doctor," said Chumbley, offering his case. "It's of no use to make yourself miserable about it if it is as I say."

"But the ladies!" cried the doctor. "My poor little wife," he added, softly.

"Well, they would be no better off if we make ourselves wretched," said Chumbley, coolly.

"Bight away from all help! Not so much as a bottle of quinine at hand!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Ah, that's a pity," said Chumbley. "Here, light a fresh cigar, man, and don't look like that amiable person who pulled Priam's curtains in the dead of the night. Come, doctor, I thought you fellows were always calm."

"So we are," cried the doctor, feeling his own pulse. "Ninety-four! That's pretty good for this climate. Yes, I'll take another cigar. But I say, Chumbley, this is very awkward."

"Would be very awkward, you mean."

"Yes, of course. And we are all unarmed."

"Well, not quite all," said Chumbley. "Being a sort of man-at-arms—a kind of wasp amongst the human insects—I always carry my sting."

"What! have you anything with you?"

"Pistol and a few cartridges," replied Chumbley, coolly.

"And I should have had my gun. You know my little double-barrelled Adams, don't you?"

"Yes; the one with the dent in the stock."

"That's the one, my lad! Well, I should have had that with me if it had not been for Mrs Bolter. I wanted to bring it, so as to collect a little, and she said it was folly, so I had to put it away. Have the others any arms?"

"Two apiece," said Chumbley. "Fleshy."

"And you can joke at a time like this?" exclaimed the doctor excitedly, while the swarthy steersman looked down at him wonderingly.

"Well, where's the use of doing anything else about what was only a passing fancy on my part. Come, doctor, smoke your cigar in peace. Perhaps, after all, Murad means to be as amiable as host can be, and we shall all get back to the station, having found no worse enemies than the sun and the champagne."

"Champagne? Nonsense, man. We shall have to drink palm wine."

"Perhaps so; but I'll make an affidavit, as the lawyers call it, that there are half a dozen cases on board with the brand *Pfüngst, Épernay* upon them, and—"

"Look—look!" exclaimed the doctor, laying his hand upon his companion's arm.

"What—what at?" said Chumbley, coolly. "I don't see anything dangerous."

"Dangerous—no! Look at that tree laden with blossoms to the water's edge."

"Yes, I see it. Very pretty. Can you see a tiger's nose poking through?"

"No, no, man; but look at the magnificent butterflies—four of them. Why, they must be nine inches across the wings."

Where's Rosebury?"

"Oh! come, doctor: you are better," exclaimed Chumbley, smiling. "That's right; don't think any more about my scare."

"This trip is completely spoiled," exclaimed the doctor, excitedly. "No shooting—no collecting! Oh! for goodness' sake, look at that bird, Chumbley!"

"What, that little humpbacked chap on the dry twig?"

"Yes."

"Hah! he looks as if he has got the pip."

"My dear fellow, that's one of the lovely cinnamon-backed trogons. Look at his crimson breast and pencilled wings."

"Yes, very pretty," said Chumbley; "but I often think, doctor, that I'd give something to see half a dozen sooty London sparrows in a genuine old English fog."

"Nonsense, man. There, too—look!" he cried, pointing, as like a streak of white light a great bird flew across the river. "That's a white eagle. I never have such chances as this when I'm out collecting."

"S'pose not," said Chumbley, drily. "It's always the case when a fellow has no gun. Precious good job for the birds."

"Oh! this is maddening!" cried the doctor. "Look—look at that, Chumbley," and he pointed to the dead branch of a tree, upon which a bird sat motionless, with the sun's rays seeming to flash from its feathers.

"Yes, that is rather a pretty chap," said Chumbley. "Plays lawn tennis evidently. Look at his tail."

"Yes, that is one of the lovely racket-tailed kingfishers, Chumbley. Ah! I wish, my dear boy, you had a little more taste for natural history. That is a very, very rare specimen, and I'd give almost anything to possess it."

"Aren't those long feathers in his way when he dives after fish?" said Chumbley.

"There it is, you see," cried the doctor. "You unobservant men display your ignorance the moment you open your lips. These Malay kingfishers do not dive after fish, but chase the beetles and butterflies."

"Poor beetles! and poor butterflies!" said Chumbley, with his eyes half closed. "I say, doctor, this is very delightful and dreamy. I begin to wish I was a rajah somewhere up the river here, with plenty of slaves and a boat, and no harassing drills, and tight uniform, and no one to bully me—not even a wife. I say, old fellow, if I am missing some day, don't let them look for me, because I shall have taken to the jungle. I'm sick of civilisation and all its shams."

"Hallo! you two," cried a voice. "Come, I say, this isn't fair. Here they are, Hilton."

It was the Resident who spoke, and Captain Hilton also appeared the next moment, the four gentlemen so completely filling up the space that the steersman hardly had room to work his oar.

"It's all right," said Chumbley, coolly. "The doctor was giving me a lesson in natural history."

"With the help of a cigar," said Hilton. "Shall we join them, Harley?"

"Yes—no. We had better get back. The Rajah might think himself slighted if we stayed away."

"Yes, you're right," exclaimed Chumbley; and getting up slowly, they all made their way back to the covered-in portion of the boat, where the beauties of the river were being discussed, and where Hilton found a seat beside Helen Perowne.

"How nice little Stuart looks in her white dress!" thought Chumbley to himself. "A fellow might do worse than marry her. Humph! Is Mr Rajah Murad going to try it on there, as he has been disappointed in Helen Perowne? No; it is only civility. 'Pon my word the fellow is quite the natural gentleman, and can't have such ideas in his head as those for which I gave him credit."

Chumbley chatted first with one and then with another; while in his soft, quiet way, looking handsome and full of desire to please his guests, the Rajah threw off his Eastern lethargy of manner, and seemed to be constantly on the watch for some fresh way of adding to the pleasures of the trip.

Not that it wanted additions, for to sit there in the shade, listening to the plash of oars and the musical ripple of the clear water against the sides of the boat, while the ever-changing panorama of green trees waving, rich bright blossoms, with now and then a glimpse of purple mountain and pale blue hazy hill, was sufficiently interesting to gratify the most exacting mind.

Now and then they passed a native village or campong, with its bamboo houses raised on platforms, the gable-ended roofs thatched with palm-leaves, and the walls frequently ingeniously woven in checkered patterns with strips of cane. The boats attached to posts or palm-tree trunks told of the aquatic lives of the people, this being a roadless country, and the rivers forming the highway from village to village or town to town.

The easy motion of the boat, the musical ripple of the water, the rhythmical sweep of the oars, and the ever-changing scenery in that pure atmosphere, redolent with the almost cloying scent of the flowers, seemed to produce its effect on all, and the conversation soon gave place to a dreamy silence, in which the beauty of the river was

watched with half-closed eyes, till after some hours' rowing against stream, a loud drumming and beating of gongs was heard, making the doctor and Chumbley exchange glances, and the former whispered to the lieutenant:

"Does that mean mischief?"

"Don't know: can't say," was the reply. "It may mean welcome. All we can do is to keep quiet and our eyes open, then we shall see."

"Very philosophical, but precious unsatisfactory," muttered the doctor, as the boats went on towards where a cluster of houses showed their pointed roofs amidst the cocoa-palm, and here a couple of flags were flying, one yellow, the other the familiar union-jack; while under the trees could be seen a party of gaily-dressed women, among whom, by the aid of a lorgnette, Hilton could make out the tall, commanding figure of the Malay Princess.

"Looks more like peace than war," thought Chumbley, as the boats neared the landing-place—a roughly-constructed platform of bamboo, alongside of which the steersman cleverly laid the first naga, the second boat being steered beside the first and there made fast. The Inche Maida, with her female attendants, then came slowly up between two lines of her slaves to welcome with floral offerings the party of guests.

"Oh, it's all nonsense, Chumbley," whispered the doctor to the lieutenant.

"Yes. I think it is," was the reply, "unless," he added, with a laugh, "they come one of the Borgia tricks and poison the cups. I mean to drink with the Princess so as to be safe."

"I don't mean to think any more about it," said the doctor.

As there was a good deal of ceremony observed by the Princess in coming to meet them, something in the form of a procession was made, the Rajah with great courtesy and good taste offering his arm to the oldest lady of the party—Mrs Doctor Bolter; and the pleasant little lady flushed slightly as she was led up to the Princess, who took her by the hands, kissed her on both cheeks, bidding her welcome and thanking her for coming; and then taking a magnificent bouquet of sweet-scented flowers from one of her attendants, she presented it to her guest.

Chumbley was one of the next to approach with the lady of a merchant settled at the station; and the Princess's eyes flashed as the bright look of welcome to the great manly young fellow changed into one of anger.

It was but a flash though, and the next moment she was smiling as if in contempt of her suspicions, for the lady Chumbley escorted was sallow and grey, and the greeting to her was made as warm and affectionate as that to the doctor's lady.

Then the Princess held out her plump, brown, well-shaped hand to Chumbley.

"I am glad to see you," she said, with a smile, and her eyes seemed to rest with satisfaction upon his goodly proportions. "Take that," she added, as she removed a great yellow jasmine sprig from her rich black hair; and Chumbley bowed, and placed it in his buttonhole.

They passed on, and other guests approached to be presented to the Princess in this sylvan drawing-room, held in the pale green light of the shade beneath the palms and lacing ferns, through which an arrowy rain of silver threads of sunlight seemed to be ever falling, flashing and scintillating the while.

The Resident was greeted with the most friendly warmth; and Grey, who held his arm, was folded in quite a warm embrace. The choicest bouquet of sweetly-scented flowers being placed in her hands, the fair English girl flushed with pleasure as her tawny hostess said, softly:

"Don't go away, Miss Stuart. You will stay and sit near me."

"You seem to have thoroughly won the Inche Maida's heart, Miss Stuart," said the Resident, looking smilingly into his companion's face.

"I like her very much," replied Grey. "She seems to be very natural and feminine. I hope she means it all."

"Yes; it would be unpleasant to find out that it was all glaze," said the Resident, thoughtfully. "But do you know," he continued, speaking very slowly, and watching the continuation of the reception the while, "I think she is a very jolly, good-hearted sort of woman, and—I—should—think—she—is—very genuine. Yes," he added, after a pause and speaking now quickly, "I am sure now that she has no more dissimulation in her than a fly. What do you say?"

"Oh, Mr Harley, what does that mean?"

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Seven.

The Forest Banquet.

Grey Stuart's exclamatory question was drawn from her as she, like the Resident, watched the way in which the Princess continued to receive her guests.

Grey, in obedience to the Inche Maida's request, and remained with the Resident close by, where they had an excellent view of what was taking place, and as, rather flattered by her reception, Grey looked on, a pang shot through her breast, as she saw that almost the next couple to advance were Captain Hilton and Helen Perowne, the

former looking flushed and happy as he walked proudly forward with his handsome companion upon his arm; the latter with her red lip slightly curled and her eyelashes half shading her large eyes, as she seemed to be superciliously, and with a contemptuous air, smiling at the people she looked upon as far beneath her and hardly worthy of her consideration.

As the Princess saw them approach—the most goodly couple of the company—her eyes seemed to dart a furious flash at Hilton, and then to become fixed and hard as her features, as she encountered the supercilious gaze of Helen Perowne.

For a brief space she paused, as if too angry to continue her task. The pause was but momentary: for, apparently making an effort over herself, she received Helen Perowne with a grave, almost majestic courtesy, taking a bouquet from an attendant and handing it to her with a slight inclination of the head; while Helen Perowne made her the department curtsy that she had been taught at the Miss Twettenhams', throwing into it the dignity of a queen.

"Enemies!" said the Resident to himself. "Strange how women read each other's thoughts!" The Princess darted a quick, reproachful glance at Hilton, and then the couple passed to the other side of the hostess as others advanced, and the Resident made his comment upon the Princess, while Grey Stuart exclaimed, in an eager whisper: "Oh! Mr Harley, what does all this mean?"

"Another diplomatic complication apparently, my dear child," he said. "Why, you and I ought to be very happy and contented to feel that we are not of an inflammable nature and are heart-whole."

"But, Mr Harley," said Grey Stuart, colouring slightly, "I do not understand it."

"And you will not give me time to explain," he said laughingly. "Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that just as we have comfortably got over the little piece of incendiarism done upon the Rajah Murad's heart by the lightning of Helen Perowne's eyes, the Inche Maida has singed her tawny wings in the light of the handsome brown optics of Master Hilton."

"Oh! but, Mr Harley," said the girl, hoarsely, "you don't think that—"

"She has taken a fancy to him?" said the Resident, quickly. "Indeed, my dear, but I do."

"I—I did not mean that," faltered Grey. "I meant, do you think—he had trifled with the Princess?"

"No, certainly not," said the Resident, sternly, and his voice was very cold and grave as he spoke; "but I do see one thing, and that is, that it is an utter mistake to have a pack of handsome young officers and good-looking girls about the station. It makes my duties twice as hard," he continued firmly, "for we have no secret instructions, no Colonial Office despatches that deal with the unions of the sexes; and if this sort of thing is going on, I shall have to ask the Government to send me out an assistant-resident well schooled in affairs of the heart."

He smiled grimly now, and there was a faint reflection of his smile in Grey Stuart's face as she looked up at him rather piteously, as if to see whether he was in earnest or in jest.

Further private remark was stopped by the Princess greeting her last guests, and then turning to lead the way towards what was literally her palm-tree palace in the jungle.

"You will stay with me, will you not?" she said, laying her hand affectionately upon Grey Stuart's arm; and she smiled down at the fair Scottish girl, who looked up at her in a half-doubting fashion; but dreading to show her feelings she took the offered hand, and the Princess led the way, the Rajah following with Mrs Bolter, and the others bringing up the rear. They passed through quite an arcade cut in the wood, whose rich growth of wondrous canes and creepers was rapidly encroaching upon the narrow space, and sending out long waving strands as if in greeting to others upon the opposite side.

At interval were openings where the green twilight was brightened by patches of sunshine; and here amidst the rich green mosses sprang up patches of many-tinted pitcher plants, while on the trunks of the huge forest trees clustered orchids of wondrous shape and hue. Right and left was the jungle, dense and utterly impenetrable, except by cutting a way through; and as they passed along this shady tunnel, the greens of some of the lower shrubs seemed to be of a velvety blackness that had a charming effect.

At last a patch of bright sunshine could be seen, showing the end of the woodland arcade, and beyond this, framed, as it were, the Inche Maida's home, with its high-pitched gabled roofs, chequered walls, woven windows, and palm-tree thatch, stood out bright and clear.

As they drew nearer they found that the house was placed on the farther side of a large lake that was literally ablaze with the crimson and golden blossoms of a kind of lotus, while its shores were fringed with an arrowy, gorgeously-spotted calladium, the surface of whose leaves seemed burnished and silvered in the sun.

"I say, doctor," said Chumbley, suddenly, "it doesn't seem such a very bad place for a picnic; and if they do mean mischief I hope it will not be till after we have had a good feed."

"Hungry?" said the doctor.

"Atrociously! I could eat the Inche Maida herself."

"She looked to me as if she could eat you," said the doctor. "I say, though, Chumbley, that was all nonsense of yours; the Rajah's as square as a cube. Not half a bad fellow; says he's coming to consult me about some of his symptoms, and is going to get me to put him right. Precious stupid of you to put such an idea in a fellow's head."

"Pitch it out, then," said the lieutenant, coolly.

"I've done it, my boy. I say, Chumbley, I'm like you, precious hungry, too. Look out for the sambals, my boy, and the curry. You'll get them all in delicious trim, I'll be bound. They say the Inche Maida keeps a capital cook, and I think it was a splendid idea to bring us here. The dinner will be ten times better than in a boat or on the shore. I say, my dear boy, what a tip-top place! Why, if I were a bachelor, I wouldn't mind marrying the Inche Maida myself, and succeeding to all her estates."

"It really is a charming place," said Chumbley, thoughtfully. "A man might make himself very jolly here. There's plenty of fishing, and shooting, and—"

"He could learn to chew betel, and smoke opium, and settle down into an Eastern dreamer."

"Oh, I don't know," said Chumbley, quietly. "He might make himself a sort of example to the people, and do a deal of good."

"Yes," said the doctor drily, "or let them do him a lot of harm. Hallo! where are the ladies going?"

"Oh, up to the rooms, I suppose," said Chumbley. "I expect the Princess does things in style. I wouldn't bet a sovereign that she has not got a regular dining-room and drawing-room with a Broadwood piano."

"I don't care a dump what she has got so long as she has a good cellar and a good kitchen," replied the doctor, "for I'm ravenous."

"Gentlemen," said the Rajah, coming forward, "the Princess begs me to act as host. Will you come indoors until the dinner is ready to be served?"

"There, doctor," whispered Chumbley, "I told you so;" and they followed the smiling Rajah into the drawing-room of the Inche Maida's house—a large roomy apartment, kept cool by mat-covered windows, and whose polished bamboo floor would have delighted a modern aesthete.

The place was a strange compound of Malay and European customs, showy articles of French furniture being mixed up with the mats and hangings made by the natives; but everywhere there were traces of the Princess possessing an ample income to enable her to indulge in any little whims or fancies in the way of decorative art.

But the group of gentlemen had hardly had time to look round before the Inche Maida appeared with her lady guests, and not being accustomed to the etiquette of modern society, led the way to a lofty room, in the middle of which, upon English table linen, was spread such a repast as would have satisfied the most exacting; and about this the party took their seats upon the soft mats in the best way they could, for there was neither chair nor table.

Still it was a picnic party, so everyone was, or professed to be, satisfied.

The Princess made a place beside her for Grey Stuart, and Captain Hilton had paused with Helen Perowne right at the other end of the room. For a moment or two, with rather lowering looks, the hostess seemed disposed to acquiesce in this, but a sudden flush animated her face, and she sent one of her slaves to request that the couple would come up higher, making room for Hilton by her side on the right—Helen being again on Hilton's right.

For a few minutes the repast was eaten in silence, but the doctor, who was in excellent spirits, started the conversation, and the next moment there was a regular buzz mingled with laughter; for the Princess threw off all appearance of annoyance, and with the Rajah, devoted herself eagerly to the comforts of her guests.

It was a novel and piquant affair; the pale, dim light of the palm-thatched room, with its waving cocoa-trees seen through the open windows; the comparative coolness after the walk through the jungle, and above all the quaint mingling of culture and half-savage life made the visitors delighted with the scene.

Then, too, the repast was unexceptionable. The very poorest Malays are clever cooks, and have excellent ideas upon the best ways of preparing a chicken; while the slaves of the Princess had placed such delicious curries and other Eastern dishes before the hungry visitors, that one and all fell to without giving further thought as to the strange kitchen in which everything had been prepared.

Delicious sweets and confections, cool acid drinks, evidently prepared from fresh fruits, with an abundance of palm and European wines were there; and the fruits alone would have been a sufficient attraction for the guests.

Durians, those strange productions of the fruit-world, that on being opened reveal to the eater so many chestnut-like seeds lying in a cream-like pulp—the said pulp tasting of sweet almonds, well-made custard, sherry, cheese, old shoes, sugar and garlic formed into one delicious whole.

Mangosteens, with their glorious nectarine aroma, and plantains or bananas of the choicest flavoured kinds; these, mingled with other fruits luscious and sweet to a degree, but whose names were unknown to the guests, formed a dessert beyond compare.

Chumbley, seeing that a good deal of the Resident's attention was taken up elsewhere, divided his time between talking to Grey Stuart and watching the Malay Princess, upon whose countenance not a shade of her former annoyance remained.

Every now and then, as her eyes wandered about, she caught Chumbley's glance as he watched her, and she always met it with a frank, open smile, and begged his acceptance of fruit or wine.

At the same time, she was constant in her attentions to Hilton and Helen Perowne, selecting choice fruits for them with her own hands, and pressing them to eat.

"Well, Miss Stuart, is not this a novelty?" said Chumbley at last. "What do you think of it all?"

Grey Stuart, who had been making a brave effort to appear bright and free from care, replied that it was all very delightful and strange.

"It seems so different from anything I have ever seen before!" she said, with animation.

"Beats a lawn party and tennis in the old country hollow!" said Chumbley. "What a capital hostess the Princess is!"

"She seems to take so much kindly interest in—in—" said Grey.

"In you, you mean," said the great fellow, smiling.

"Oh, no," said Grey, naïvely, "I think it was in you."

"Well, I don't know," replied Chumbley, thoughtfully; "she has been very attentive and kind certainly, but then she has been far more so to Hilton and Miss Perowne. Why I saw her peel an orange for old Hilton with her own fair—I mean dark—fingers."

"I suppose it is the Malayan way of showing courtesy to a guest," said Grey, in an absent tone of voice, as her eyes were wandering from Captain Hilton to Helen Perowne and back; and then, in spite of herself, she sighed gently, a fact that did not pass unnoticed by Chumbley, who made of it a mental note.

Meanwhile, the half-savage banquet went on with fresh surprises from time to time for the guests, who were astonished at the extent to which the Malay Princess had adopted the best of our English customs.

Perhaps the most critical of all was Mrs Bolter, who did not scruple about making whispered remarks to her brother about the various delicacies spread around.

"If Henry does not come soon, Arthur," she whispered, "I shall send you to fetch him. By the way, those sweets are very nicely made. Taste them."

"Thank you, dear Mary, no," he said, quietly, as he turned an untasted fruit round and round in his long, thin fingers.

"Arthur, how can you be so absurd?" whispered his sister. "The people will be noticing you directly."

"What have I done, my dear Mary?" he replied, looking quite aghast.

"Nothing but stare at Helen Perowne," she said, in a low angry voice. "Surely you don't want her to flirt with you!"

"Hush, Mary!" he said gravely. "Your words give me pain."

"And your glances at that proud, handsome, heartless creature give me pain, Arthur," she replied, in the same tone. "I cannot bear it."

The Reverend Arthur sighed, let his eyes rest upon his fruit, raised them again, and found himself in time to arrest an arrow-like glance from Helen's eyes sent the whole length of the table, and he closed his own and shuddered as if the look had given him a pang.

"I cannot get Henry to look at me," whispered Mrs Bolter after a time. "He seems quite guilty about something, and ashamed to meet my eye. Arthur, I am sure he is drinking more wine than is good for his health."

"Oh, no, my dear Mary," replied her brother. "Surely Henry Bolter knows how to take care of his constitution."

"I don't know that," said the little lady, with asperity, "and he keeps talking to the Princess more than I like."

She telegraphed to the little doctor with her eyes, but in vain; he evaded summons after summons, and Mrs Bolter began to grow wroth.

Suddenly she saw him give a bit of a start, and he seemed to be watching the slaves, who were carrying round trays of little china cups full of some native wine.

Chumbley saw it too, and for a moment he felt excited, but directly after he laughed it off.

"The doctor thinks that the Borgia dose is going round," he said to himself, but half aloud, and Grey caught a portion of his words and turned pale.

"Borgia?" she faltered, turning to him. "Do you mean poison?"

"Did you hear my words?" he said, quickly. "Oh, it was only nonsense."

"But you think there is poison in those little cups, Mr Chumbley? Quick! stop him!" she gasped, with an agonised look. "Mr Hilton is going to drink. Too late! too late!"

"Hush, Miss Stuart, be calm," whispered Chumbley; "you will draw attention to yourself. I tell you it is all nonsense: a foolish fancy. Here is a tray," he continued, as a slave came up. "Now see, I will drink one of these cupfuls to

convince you.”

“And I will drink too!” she cried, excitedly; and Chumbley stared to see so much fire in one whom he had looked upon as being tame and quiet to a degree.

“No; don’t you drink,” he said, in a low voice.

“Then you do believe there is danger?” she said, excitedly.

“I do and I do not,” he replied, in the same low tone. “There,” he said, tossing off the contents of the cup, which was filled with a delicious liqueur, “I don’t think so now; but I would not drink if I were you.”

As the words left his lips, Grey Stuart raised the little cup to her mouth, slowly drained it, and set it down.

Chumbley’s brow contracted, but he could not help admiring the girl’s firmness.

“Do you like my wine?” said a voice then, and the lieutenant started on finding that the Princess had been narrowly watching them.

“Yes, it is delicious,” he said, smiling.

“I drink to you, as you English do,” she said, taking a cup from the same tray as that which had borne those of Chumbley and Grey Stuart. “I drink to your health—you two,” she said again, and she seemed to drain the cup. “Do you not think it good?” she said, in a low voice, and with a singularly impressive smile. “Surely you do not think I would give poison to my friends.”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Eight.

After the Feast.

The Inche Maida turned her head just then in reply to some remark made by Captain Hilton, and Chumbley took advantage thereof to whisper to his companion:

“The Princess must have understood what we said. How provoking that I should have uttered such a foolish remark! Why, I quite frightened you!”

“I was a little alarmed,” faltered Grey, who seemed agitated. “It sounded so very dreadful, Mr Chumbley,” she added, after a pause. “You have always been so kind and gentlemanly to me, may I ask a favour?”

“To be sure,” he replied.

She paused again, and he saw that she was growing more agitated, and that she could hardly speak.

“I want you to promise me—”

Here she stopped again, and looked piteously in his face, her lips refusing to frame the words she wished to say.

“You wish me to promise never to take notice of the secret you betrayed just now, Miss Stuart?”

She nodded quickly, and her eyes sought his in a pleading way that set him thinking of what her feelings must be for Hilton.

“Give me the credit of being a gentleman, Miss Stuart,” he said, at last, quietly.

“I do—I do!” she said, eagerly. “Indeed I do, Mr Chumbley!”

“I am an old friend of Captain Hilton. We knew one another when we were quite lads, and I exchanged into this regiment so that we might be together. He’s a very good fellow, is Hilton, although he has grown so hot-headed and liable to make mistakes. I like him for many reasons, and I can’t tell you how glad I am to have learned what I have to-day.”

“Pray say no more, Mr Chumbley,” said Grey, with a troubled look.

“But I shall say more, even at the risk of being considered rude,” continued Chumbley. “He is making a great mistake, just as a great many more men have made the same blunder.”

Grey tried to speak, but the words would not come.

“He’ll wake up some day,” continued Chumbley. “At present his eyes are dazzled.”

“Mr Chumbley!” said Grey, in a low, earnest, appealing tone.

She only uttered the young officer’s name, but the way in which it was spoken sufficed, and he bowed his head in answer, and for the next few minutes neither spoke.

“Miss Stuart, you may trust me,” he said, at last.

“I do, Mr Chumbley,” she replied, and a conscious feeling of pride and satisfaction thrilled the young soldier, as he

looked in the frank grey eyes.

The conversation went buzzing on all around, nobody seeming to notice him; and Chumbley began to commune with himself as he gazed straight before him now.

"She's taken with Hilton," he said. "There's no mistake about it. Now, why didn't the little maid take a fancy to me? She's very nice—very nice indeed; and I think she would be as earnest and truthful as a woman could be. Isn't my luck, though—no, not my luck.

"By Jove, what an idiot that Hilton is," he continued, as he glanced at the young officer, who did not seem to be aware of the fact that anyone was present but Helen, whose every look and gesture were watched with rapt attention; while from time to time she seemed to rouse herself from her languid indifferent way, and repay him with a smile.

It was rather a curious scene, and as she recovered from the agitation consequent upon her little encounter with Chumbley, Grey Stuart read a good deal of what was going on around.

It seemed to her that Helen Perowne, whom she had promised their old instructresses to befriend and aid, was the principal object of attraction to all. She felt no jealousy on this account, only a curious sense of trouble. Her affection for Helen was as great as ever, but always there seemed to be a gathering cloud of trouble right ahead, and in an undefined way this seemed to gather and threaten them both.

Sometimes her eyes fell upon little Mrs Bolter, who appeared far from enjoying the day, but to be ready at any moment to go in quest of the doctor, who kept leaving his seat to chat with someone at another part.

There was always a smile for Grey though, whenever Mrs Bolter caught her eye, and the exchange of glances seemed to comfort the little lady for the time.

The next minute Grey would see that the Rajah was looking in Helen's direction, and she trembled at the idea of further trouble arising; but the Malay's thoughts were hidden beneath a set smile, which did duty on all occasions now, and was bestowed upon Helen, upon the Princess, Mrs Bolter, even upon the watcher in turn.

Then, as she saw how impressive were Captain Hilton's attentions, Grey sighed softly, and in remembrance of what had been said at Mayleyfield, she told herself that perhaps the best thing that could happen to Helen would be for her to become the young officer's wife.

Just then Chumbley turned to her, and as if their conversation had had no pause—

"Let me add this," he continued, "Hilton is one of the best fellows that ever breathed, only he has gone a little wild over this affair."

"Pray say no more, Mr Chumbley," pleaded Grey.

"Why not?" said the other, quietly. "I thought we were to be friends, Miss Stuart. Do you know I'm going to risk your displeasure by saying a word on my friend's behalf?"

Grey tried to speak—to recover her usual calm self-possession, but her words would not come.

"This is all nonsense, you know," continued Chumbley, "and I don't know that I blame Hilton much. It's only natural, you know, and the poor fellow's only like everyone else. They all get caught by the beauty just the same as I was. You're not a man, you know, so you can't understand it. Now, for instance, take me. I'm a great big fellow—a sort of a small giant in my way—strong as a horse. I could take that Rajah up by his neck and one leg, and pitch him out of window; but when Helen Perowne came here, and gave me one of her looks, I was done, and she led me about just as she pleased. Ah! there's a very comic side to it all."

"But you soon broke your silken string, Mr Chumbley," said Grey, trying to speak in his own bantering tone.

"Not really," he said confidentially. "The fact is, she broke it. I couldn't have got away if I had not seen that she was only playing with me. It was she who broke it by beginning to lead others on. I say, Miss Stuart, what awful old women your schoolmistresses must have been!"

"Awful old women?" exclaimed Grey. "Yes, to bring up Miss Perowne as such—a man-killer."

"Oh! Mr Chumbley," cried Grey, "the Miss Twettenhams were the sweetest, most amiable of ladies, and Helen Perowne made them really very anxious—"

She checked herself suddenly, as if annoyed at having spoken against her friend, at whom she glanced now, to see that she seemed to be really the queen of the feast.

"Yes," said Chumbley, drily, "you're right. They must have been nice old ladies; but about Hilton," he continued. "You see it's like this; a fellow gets caught before he knows where he is, and then he thinks he has arrived at the happiest time of his life; then, a few days later, he sees some other fellow coming to the happiest point of *his* life; and then, after a flush or two of fever, the first fellow begins to feel much better. I say, Miss Stuart, I was awfully in love with Helen Perowne."

"Yes, I think you were," she replied, with a sad little smile.

"Awfully," he said again. "It was all over with me. I fell in love in five minutes, and I thought her quite a goddess;

while now—”

“Yes,” said Grey, smiling; and her face looked very bright and ingenuous. “While now?”

“Well now—I don’t,” he said, slowly. “Master Hilton won’t by-and-by. I say, Miss Grey,” he whispered, laughing merrily, “do you feel as if you were going to die?”

“To die?” she said, opening her eyes very widely in her surprise; and as they met those of Chumbley he could not help thinking what sweet, earnest eyes they were.

“Just like those of that girl tying the handkerchief round the fellow’s arm in Millais’ picture of *The Huguenot*,” he said to himself. “Hah! he’ll be a lucky fellow who wins her for his own!”

“Yes,” he said aloud, after a pause, during which he had looked so earnestly at her that she had cast down her eyes and blushed; “yes, of the poisoned cup. No; out here in this land of romance, and living as we are amongst sultans, and princes, and slaves, just as if the Arabian nights had been brought into private life—I ought to say poisoned chalice or envenomed goblet, but I won’t; I’ll say cup, with a dose in it. I say, Miss Stuart,” he drawled, “it was too bad of you to be so suspicious.”

“Are you two lovers?” said a deep, rich voice, close by them; and they both turned suddenly, to see that the Princess was watching them with a peculiar smile upon her lip.

“Why do you ask that?” said Chumbley, laughing.

“Because you look like it,” said the Princess. “I am glad: I like you both. You are a very wise man,” she added, tapping Chumbley on the shoulder with her fan.

“As you are wrong about the engagement, my dear Princess,” said Chumbley, laughing, “so it is natural that you should be wrong about my wisdom, for Miss Stuart and I are only the best of friends.”

The Princess looked at him very sharply, and then turned her eyes upon Grey Stuart, who, though her colour was slightly heightened, felt amused at their host’s frank, bold questioning, and met the Princess’s eyes with so ingenuous a look that the latter’s suspicions were half disarmed.

“Well,” said the Inche Maida, smiling, “what do you say?”

“That Mr Chumbley is my very good friend; that is all.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said the Princess, smiling. “I don’t see why you two should not be more than friends; and sometimes I feel half glad, sometimes half sorry. What strange people you English are!”

She took Grey’s hand and held it, patting it affectionately as she spoke.

“Why are we so strange?” said Grey, smiling.

“Because it is your nature; you seem so cold and hard to touch, while a spark will set us on fire. I thought when I went to your head chief, Mr Harley, and told him and his officers of my troubles—how I, a weak woman, was oppressed by cruel neighbours—that it would have been enough to make him send fighting men to drive my enemies away. But no; it is talk, talk, talk. You are cold and distant, and you love your friends!”

“But when we make friends we are very faithful and sincere,” said Grey, earnestly.

“Some of you, my child—some of you,” said the Princess, nodding her head, and looking intently at the fair, sweet face before her. “Some of you can be very true and sincere as you call it; some of you I would not trust. And you think,” with a quick look of her dark eyes, “that you could not trust some of us. Well, perhaps you are right; but we shall see—we shall see.”

Volume One—Chapter Twenty Nine.

Later On.

Seeing how earnestly the Princess was talking to Grey Stuart, Chumbley looked around for another companion amongst the busy, chatting throng, and found him in the person of Doctor Bolter, who was coming that way.

“Well?” said the latter.

“Well?” replied Chumbley.

“It’s all right.”

“Right? Oh, yes, I think so; but, I say, doctor, the next time you are lunching with a native, and you think the cups are poisoned, don’t show it quite so plainly.”

“Did I show it, my dear boy?”

“Horribly,” said Chumbley, coolly. “Here are you, a man who passes his time in giving other people numbers of poisonous doses, and yet you make so much fuss about taking one yourself!”

"Tut—tut, man! Tut—tut!" ejaculated the doctor. "Hold your whisht, as old Stuart says. I couldn't help the thought; but it was a very unjust one I must say."

"So purposeless," said Chumbley. "Why should the Princess want to poison us?"

"Out of spite perhaps," said the doctor. "I don't think we have behaved very generously to her in reply to her appeal."

"On the head of the Colonial Secretary be it," said Chumbley, relapsing into his slow drawl.

"But unfortunately it does not fall upon his head," retorted the doctor, grimly. "The Princess, disappointed in her appeal, could not reach the Colonial Secretary in London, but she could reach us."

"And she won't do anything of the kind, doctor," said Chumbley, warmly. "She's a very good sort of woman, in spite of her skin, and her party is a great success. It will be our turn to do something next."

"What, in the shape of a feed?"

"Yes, I think so; only this hot climate seems to take all the energy out of a fellow."

For the Princess's party was undoubtedly a grand success, the fairy-like aspect of the scene adding immensely to the effect. The conduct of the Sultan was simply perfect; and his efforts to supplement the hostess in her endeavour to give pleasure won the encomiums of all.

As evening approached there was a little nervousness displayed by the ladies at the idea of staying late; and one and all appealed to Mrs Bolter, who immediately began metaphorically to play the part of hen, and displayed a desire to gather the whole of the ladies beneath her wings.

"I promise you there is no occasion for fear," said the Princess, earnestly; "and besides, if you depart so soon, the preparations my people have made to illuminate the jungle will be all in vain."

"What do you say, Mr Harley?" said little Mrs Bolter, rather petulantly, for she was growing tired. "Dr Bolter is not near for me to appeal to him. Don't you think we ought to go?"

"You will miss the moonlight ride down the river if you go so soon," said the Princess, "and that will be far more beautiful than anything here."

"I think," said the Resident, quietly, "that when our friend and ally—"

"Ally, Mr Harley?" said the Princess, in a low voice.

"Has taken so much pains for our gratification, we should be behaving coldly if we hurried away. Ladies, I think I may promise you a safe return."

"Safe return?" said the Princess.

"Yes," said the Resident; "the river is deep, but perfectly clear of obstructions, and we have good rowers and good boats."

The Princess was on the whole so pressing, and seemed so likely to be offended if her proposals were slighted, that after a little consultation it was finally determined to stay, and the time passed rapidly on.

The Rajah had provided music and Malay dancers, while the Inche Maida's women proved to be possessed of pleasant voices, singing in chorus in a mournful minor way. Then, as the evening closed in, and the ingeniously-arranged lamps kept starting into life amidst the lustrous green of the forest trees, the scene became more and more fairy-like, and beautiful in the extreme.

"Talk about the Arabian nights," said Chumbley in the interval of a dance, during which he had Helen Perowne for partner, "I think they would have had to be very fine nights indeed to come up to this. It is about the best thing I ever saw."

"Yes," said Helen, dreamily, "it is very charming;" and she glanced carelessly round from beneath her long fringed lids, as if she were quite accustomed to displays made in her honour and they quite palled upon her.

"Yes, it is charming," said Chumbley, in an amused way. "Get much of this sort of thing at school?"

Helen's eyes opened wide, and she darted an angry look at the speaker.

"How she would like to bring me to my knees," thought Chumbley to himself.

"The insolent! How dare he treat me as if I were a schoolgirl? but I'll punish him yet."

The quadrille went on, and at the end Chumbley led his partner round the open space set apart for the dancers; Helen languidly using her fan, and lowering her eyes or talking to the lieutenant whenever they passed the Rajah.

"I say, Miss Perowne," said Chumbley, lightly, just as they were near the Princess, who was talking quietly to Grey Stuart and the Resident, "how would you like to give up civilisation, and live out here?"

"What an absurd question, Mr Chumbley!" she replied, haughtily, and with the knowledge that question and answer

were heard by the group they passed. "Not at all; I detest the barbarity of the country, and the Malay customs!"

"Well, I don't know," said Chumbley; "I don't see much barbarity. The people are simple in their habits, but decidedly refined."

"Absurd!" said Helen, contemptuously.

"I think Miss Perowne promised me her hand for the next dance," said the Rajah, approaching with a soft, cat-like step, smiling and bowing the while.

Helen looked annoyed, but she was mistress of her emotions; and quietly relinquishing Chumbley's arm, she laid her gloved hand upon the Rajah's sleeve as coolly as if there had never been between them the slightest cause for uneasiness.

"She's a clever one and no mistake," said Chumbley to himself. "I hope she won't be stupid enough to begin flirting again. Matters seem to; have settled down now, and it will be a pity for them to become troublesome once more. Wonder where the doctor is? I think I'll lure him behind the trees, and we'll have a cigar together. It's too hot to dance."

He turned to go, after a final glance at Helen and the Rajah, but found himself face to face with the Inche Maida.

"Ah, giant?" she said, in excellent English, laying her hand upon his arm, and, as it were, taking him into custody. "I heard what you said a little while ago to beautiful Helen Perowne, and I am going to ask you the same question."

"I say," thought Chumbley, "this isn't leap-year, is it?"

"How would you like to give up civilisation and live out here in the wilds?"

Chumbley strolled on with the Princess in the soft light shed by the paper lanterns beneath the spreading palms, between whose mighty pinnate leaves an occasional glimpse of the lustrous starlit sky could be obtained. All around was very beautiful, and through the soft, scent-laden summer air came the strains of music sounding soft and subdued. There was a delicious languor in the breeze that seemed to prison the spirits in a gentle calm; and as Chumbley strolled softly on, he said, slowly:

"Well, I don't know, Princess; but just now I seem to fancy that it would be just the sort of life that would suit me."

"And Captain Hilton?" said the Princess, smiling.

"I don't know about Hilton," replied Chumbley. "I fancy he's more ambitious than I am. For my part I should want an elephant, plenty of fishing, plenty of shooting—"

"Anything else?" said the Princess, who seemed amused at the young man's cool, easy-going way.

"Well, it's a regular paradise out here. Very beautiful."

"Yes, my country is beautiful," said the Princess.

"Well, if I were to come out to such a place to play Adam, I should want an Eve. You don't understand that."

"What savages you think us," said the Princess, warmly. "I challenge you! I know more of your religion and history than you do about mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Chumbley heartily; and the Princess looked angry, but afterwards seemed to enjoy the young man's genuine mirth.

"Do you English think it good manners to laugh at a Malay lady?" she said reproachfully.

"Laugh? At you?" he said frankly. "My dear Princess, I was laughing at myself. Why, I'm one of the most ignorant fellows under the sun. I know my drill, and how to handle a gun; that's about all."

"You depreciate yourself," said the Princess, in an admonitory tone; "but I do know who were Adam and Eve. You mean that if you lived out here you would want a wife."

Chumbley nodded.

"Marry Helen Perowne and settle down out here. I would build you a house."

"Heaven forbid!" said Chumbley, laughing. "No, Princess, I am not one of her slaves. I look at her now as I should at a beautiful picture."

"You look at a beautiful picture?" replied the Princess, wonderingly. "Oh, yes, I understand now. What? so soon! Well, well, I daresay you are right, Mr Harley," she said, in reply to a remark made by the Resident.

"Yes, he's quite right, madam," said Dr Bolter, who also bustled up. "Dew's falling fast. We must not have any of my folks down with fever after so pleasant a trip."

"I always take your advice, doctor," said the Princess, smiling; "and say it is good."

"It is a long way back," said the Resident, smiling.

"Yes, but you have the stream with you," said the Princess. "Where is the Sultan? There: you shall go. I will not keep you longer than is right, for I want you to come again."

"After so pleasant a welcome, I'm sure all will be too happy," said the Resident.

"I shall only be too glad to entertain you," replied the Princess, "if I am in a position to do so. Who knows? You English refuse to help me; and perhaps by another month I may be poor, and little better than a slave."

"But with plenty of friends in Sindang," said the little doctor, warmly. "Here is one."

"I know it doctor," she replied, taking his outstretched hand.

"Grey, my child," whispered Mrs Doctor, who was some distance away, "I'm sure that is a very dreadful woman! It does not take so long as that to shake hands!"

"I think it is only the Princess's manner," replied Grey, smiling.

"And very bad manners too," said the little lady. "Now, where is Arthur?"

"That is he," said Grey, "following Helen with her cloak."

"Now, there!" cried the little lady, angrily, "now is my brother Arthur the man to be carrying Helen Perowne's cloak? Oh, dear me! I do wish we were safe back at home! I don't like these picnics in savage lands at all!"

"Good-bye, if I don't have a chance to speak to you again, Mr Chumbley," said the Princess. "Is not your friend coming to say good-bye? Ah, I see! he is in attendance with your Mr Chaplain upon the beauty."

"I'd go and say good-night to Madame Inche Maida, Hilton," whispered Chumbley, the next minute to his friend, and the latter went up and shook hands, thanking the Princess for the pleasant evening they had had, and hoping soon to see her again.

"I thank you," said the Princess, coldly. "I hope you have enjoyed yourself; but, you are keeping Mr Perowne's little girl waiting. Good-night."

That was imagination on the Princess's part, for Helen was talking to the chaplain, and had her back to them.

"She's a curious woman," said Hilton; "and I don't like her a bit!"

And then, taking advantage of his dismissal, he bowed, and went to where Grey Stuart was talking to Mrs Bolter, as a half-way house to Helen, at whose side he was soon after.

Half an hour later the whole party were safely embarked. The boats were hung with lanterns, the full moon was above the black jungle-trees, and the river looked like molten silver as the oars dipped in regular cadence to the rowers' song. Then on and on floated the two great nagas; the whole scene, as they glided between the two black banks of trees, being so weirdly beautiful, so novel, and so strange, that it affected all present, though in different ways.

Helen was hot and peevish; Mrs Bolter was petulant and fretting about the doctor stopping so long away; while Grey Stuart felt as if at the smallest provocation she would burst into tears.

"I say, Chum, old fellow," said Hilton, as they stood outside their quarters in the brilliant moonlight smoking a cigar before turning in for the night, and after a chat about their pleasant passage down to the landing-stage—"I say, Chum, old fellow."

"Hullo!"

"She doesn't seem to like me, but not a bad sort of woman that Princess."

"Not at all. Pity she's so brown."

"Yes, rather; but I say, Chum."

"Hullo!"

"I'll bet a dollar she squeezed your hand when you were coming away, eh?"

"Never tell tales out of school," said Chumbley, slowly. "Squeezes of hands leave no impression, so they don't count. I didn't ask you if you squeezed Helen Perowne's hand."

"I shouldn't mind if you did, old lad. Perhaps so; but don't bother, and pass me a match."

Chumbley chuckled softly to himself; and after a time they finished their cigars and turned in, the lieutenant sleeping soundly, while the rest of the principal personages in this narrative were wakeful and tossing from side to side, perhaps the most restless being the successful beauty, Helen Perowne.

The Return Party.

Mr Perowne's was acknowledged to be by far the best garden at the station; its favourable position—sloping, as it did, down to the river—prevented any approach to aridity, and as he had gone to the expense of getting three Chinese gardeners—men who were ready enough, if not to originate, to take up any suggested idea—the result was a charmingly-picturesque succession of smooth lawns and shady walks, sheltered by the choicest flowering trees the country produced.

He spared no expense to make the garden attractive, and on the night of Helen's twenty-first birthday, when they gave a garden-party, the place, with its Chinese lanterns and illuminated summer-houses, had an effect that seemed to Grey Stuart the most lovely she had ever seen.

"I quite envy you sometimes," she said, as Helen, in her calm assurance, kissed her and welcomed her in a patronising way; "surrounded as you are with luxuries, you ought to be very happy."

"And yet I am not," said Helen, bitterly, and she turned to meet some fresh arrivals.

"You've a deal to grumble about," said old Stuart, who had heard his daughter's words. "What's all this but show and tinsel? What's it worth? Bah!"

Her father's words did not comfort her, for she felt very sore; and as she strolled with him down one of the paths she thought to herself that there was an old fable about a dog in a manger, and in her quiet, homely fashion, it seemed to her that Helen was playing that part.

For she had, in her unselfish sorrow, seen that for some little time past Hilton was not happy in his love. Helen was playing with him, and he seemed to feel it bitterly, though he was too proud to show it; and she thought to herself, what would she not give to be able to whisper comfort to the young officer, and pour out for him the riches of her love—an impossibility, for in her way she was as proud as Helen herself.

"Ah, Mr Stuart! How do, Miss Stuart?" drawled a voice just behind them. "Glad to see you both. I say, Miss Stuart, do you want a fellow to play cavalier? I'm quite at liberty. Mr Stuart, there's plenty of claret-cup, champagne, and cigars in the little pagoda, and it's nice and cool."

"It's like an oven out here," growled the merchant. "I say, Grey, you don't want me, do you? Chumbley will take care of you. Come to me when you want to go."

For answer she placed her hand on the lieutenant's arm, and he took her round the grounds.

"Looks nice, doesn't it?" he said. "Seen all the grandees?"

"I have only seen Helen and Mr Perowne," she replied.

"Looks well to-night, 'pon my word. I saw Murad's eyes light up like a firefly as he shook hands with her, but he pulled himself to directly. Perowne does these things well. Old boy must be pretty rich."

"They say he is, very," replied Grey. "Here is the Rajah coming up. Mr Chumbley, I always feel afraid of that man."

"Hold tight by my arm, then, and I'll punch his head if he looks at you. He shan't run away with you while I am by."

Grey laughed merrily, and in the midst of her mirth the Rajah came up.

"You English people always seem so bright and merry," he said, smiling, and looking very handsome as he stood by the side of a lantern. "We people always feel dull and sad."

"Have a glass of champagne then, Rajah. It is a fine cure for sadness. I say," continued Chumbley, "you'll have to imitate this, and give an evening *fête*."

"Yes," he said, eagerly; "I was thinking so. But I would have more lanterns in the trees, and more flowers."

"To be sure," said Chumbley. "You'll invite me?"

"Will you promise me to come?" said the Rajah, holding out his hand.

"I will indeed," replied Chumbley, grasping it in return.

"And you too, Miss Stuart?"

"You must ask papa," she said, quietly.

"I will," said the Rajah, earnestly. "Where is he?"

"Having a cigar in the little pagoda, Rajah," replied Chumbley; and the Malay Prince nodded and smiled, and went away.

"Here, I say," said Chumbley, as soon as they were alone. "I'm going to have a quarrel, Miss Stuart. I thought there would have been a chance for me, and that my rejected addresses would be accepted, and now you have behaved like this."

"What do you mean, Mr Chumbley? If it is an enigma, I cannot guess it; if it is a joke, you must explain it; for I am

only a Scottish maiden.”

“Joke?—no,” he said; “I call it no joke. Here you and the Rajah have the effrontery to make up matters before me.”

“I and the Rajah!” cried Grey.

“Yes; you told him to go and ask papa. I heard you.”

“Oh, Mr Chumbley, what a poor joke,” she cried; and then she stopped short, for the handsome face and stately form of the Inche Maida, followed by one attendant, suddenly came upon them from out of a dark side-walk.

“Then I was right,” she said, holding up her finger at both in turn. “You two are lovers.”

“And we always talk about other people,” said Chumbley, as the Princess kissed Grey rather coldly upon the forehead. “Come along with us, and you shall hear.”

His frank, easy manner seemed to chase away the Inche Maida’s coldness, and laying her gloved hand upon the young man’s arm, she pressed it rather more warmly than English etiquette requires, and together they promenaded the grounds, coming twice over upon Hilton, who seemed dull and out of sorts; while Helen was full of vivacity, her eyes sparkling, her words full of bright repartee; and even the Resident, with his rather sardonic humour, seemed to look at her more kindly than usual.

This look seemed to spoil her, for she immediately after began to flirt merrily, first with one and then with another, sending poisoned stabs through Hilton’s breast, and making him gnaw his lip as he darted reproachful glances at her from time to time.

Grey saw a good deal of this as the party gradually drew together to where an *al fresco* supper was spread upon the lawn, and her sufferings were as acute as those of Hilton.

“She does not care for him in the least,” she said to herself, as she noted Helen’s conduct with a young officer present.

“Miss Stuart, may I take you to a seat? They are going to have supper now.”

Grey started and turned pale. Why had Captain Hilton asked her? she thought. Then her heart answered,—Because Helen was trifling with him.

“I am engaged to Mr Chumbley, I think,” she said, coldly, torturing herself by her words; for she felt as if she would have given worlds to have been seated at his side.

“Perhaps the Princess will allow me to be her escort?” said Hilton, stiffly.

“Yes, I will,” said the Princess, quickly, and she went with him towards the supper-table.

“Well,” said Chumbley, “suppose we go and find places, Miss Stuart; only if I bore you don’t be above telling me.”

She turned her soft grey eyes upon him laughingly—

“I am very much obliged to you,” she said with a smile; “but I fear you will find me very dull company.”

“Well, as I’m dull too, it will be all right.”

The supper was all that could be desired, and very beautiful everything seemed beneath the bright suspended lamps. Flowers, fruit, all that money could provide, were there; and the mingling of English and Eastern customs added to the charm of the banquet beneath the great mellow stars.

The wine sparkled, merry voices chatted; and the doctor’s speech proposing their young hostess’s good health, and many happy returns of the day, was so great a triumph, that Mrs Bolter, who had been looking very cross, and trying in vain to get her husband to her side, began to seem a little better satisfied, especially as, a few minutes after, he came behind her chair and whispered:

“I hope I did not say anything to displease you, my dear.”

Then, as the little band, composed of half a dozen soldiers of the force, began a waltz, the company strolled once more in couples about the grounds; but only to return before long to the front of the house and form one huge group composed of smaller groups, with the conversation in full swing.

End of Volume One.

Volume Two—Chapter One.

Strange Behaviour.

In a tropical climate, where the days are too often one long punishment of heat and weariness, people believe in the dim early mornings and in the comparative coolness of the dark star-spangled nights. The day seems there a time for shelter, rest, and often for siestas of a protracted kind. Hence it follows that an evening-party is often drawn out long

into the night, and guests who are comfortably seated upon a cool, dimly-lit lawn feel in no hurry to leave the open air for the mosquito-haunted heat of a sleeping-chamber.

But all pleasant things come to an end, and guests began to leave Mr Perowne's. The absence of the two young officers passed unnoticed, and several friends took their departure after a glance round, not seeing Helen, and concluding that she was engaged.

Mrs Doctor Bolter had been, to use her own expression, "on pins and needles" for quite two hours, trying to get the doctor home; but to every fresh appeal he had something to say by way of excuse. This one had to be seen—that one had said he wished to have a few words with him—it was impossible to go at present.

"Helen Perowne will think it rude of you, my dear," he said, reproachfully. "Go and have a chat with her again."

Mrs Bolter tightened her lips, and made up her mind, as she subsided, to talk to the doctor next day; but at last she was driven to extremity, and captured her husband after a long hunt—in every minute of which she had made more and more sure that he was flirting with some lady in one or other of the shady walks. She found him at last under a tree, seated upon one bamboo chair with his legs on another, in company with Grey Stuart's father, who was in a precisely similar attitude. A bamboo table was between them, upon which was a homely looking bottle and a great glass jug of cold water to help them in the mixings that took place occasionally as they sat and smoked.

"Oh, here you are, Dr Bolter," said the lady, with some asperity.

"Yes, my dear, here I am," he replied: "arn't you nearly ready to go?"

Mrs Doctor Bolter gasped, for the effrontery of this remark was staggering after she had been spending the last two hours in trying to get him away.

"Ready to go!" she exclaimed, angrily. "I think it is disgracefully late; and I can't think how Mr Stuart can sit there so patiently, knowing all the while, as he does, that his child ought to be taken home."

Mr Stuart chuckled.

"Bolter, old fellow," he said, "you'd better go. That's just how my wife used to talk to me."

"Mr Stuart, I'm surprised at you," said Mrs Doctor, in her most impressive manner.

"Yes, it was very rude," he said drily. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind taking Grey home with you? I don't think I shall come just yet."

"Certainly, I will take the dear child home," replied Mrs Bolter. "I don't think it is proper for her to be here so late."

"Humph! Who's she with?" said the old merchant.

"The Princess," was the reply.

"Oh, she's all right then. Good-night, Bolter, if you must go. Won't you have just one wee drappie mair?"

The doctor shook his head with Spartan fortitude, and buttoned up his coat, but only to unbutton it directly.

"Good-night, Stuart; we'll take your little lass home."

"Thankye; do," was the reply, and the dry old Scot sat back in his chair chuckling, as he saw the doctor marched off.

"Seen Helen about, Stuart?" said Mr Perowne, coming up five minutes later.

"No; not for an hour."

"If you see her, tell her I'm up by the drawing-room window. People keep going, and she's not here."

"All right."

"By the way, when can I see you to-morrow?" said Mr Perowne, eagerly. "I want to chat over that matter with you."

"I shall be in my office all day if you like to call."

"Yes; to be sure—of course. I'll call in," said the merchant, hastily, as if the business was unpleasant to him; and he went away muttering.

"Hah!" grunted the old merchant, "pride must have a fall, they say; and when pride does fall, it always bumps itself pretty hard upon the stones."

The remarks made by Mrs Bolter to her husband, as they left the old Scotch merchant, were of rather a forcible nature; but there was this excuse for her: that she was very hot and extremely tired after the long evening in the enervating climate; and this had no doubt acidified her temper. But no matter what she said, the amiable little doctor took it all in good part.

He was a naturalist and student of the human frame, and it was quite natural, he told himself, that his wife should be cross now that she was weary.

"Babies are always fretful when they are tired," he said to himself; "and a woman is only a grownup baby. Poor little soul! she will be all right in the morning."

"Why are we going in this direction, Dr Bolter?" said the little lady. "This is not the nearest way to the gate."

"Must go and say good-night to Perowne and Madam Helen," he replied.

"They would not miss us," said Mrs Doctor, tartly. "I daresay we should only be interrupting some pleasant flirtation."

"Oh—oh—oh! I say," said the doctor, jocularly. "For shame, my dear, for shame! I'll tell Perowne what you say about his flirtations."

"Don't be foolish, Bolter," said his wife, sharply. "You know what I mean."

"What, about Perowne flirting with the ladies?" he said, with a smothered chuckle.

"About Helen Perowne," she said, shortly. "Well, here we are upon the lawn, and of course there's no host here and no hostess."

"But there's little Grey," said the doctor. "By jingo, I'd about forgotten her."

"No wonder, sir, when you have been drinking with her father to such an extent."

"Fine thing in this climate, my dear," said the doctor. "Where's Arthur?"

"Tired of all this frivolity, I suppose, and gone home like a sensible man. He does not drink whiskey."

"Oh, dear," said the doctor, "I'll never take another drop if you talk to me like this, but poison myself with liquor-ammoniae instead."

"Liquor what, sir?"

"Ammonias, my dear, sal-volatile as you call it when you require a stimulus. Well, Grey, my child, we are to take you home."

"So soon, Dr Bolter?" said the Inche Maida, by whose side Grey was seated.

"I think it quite late enough, Princess," said Mrs Bolter, austere. "Have you seen my brother?"

"Yes, I saw him following Miss Perowne down the walk," said the Princess, quietly enjoying Mrs Bolter's start. "I suppose it is pleasanter and cooler in the dark parts of the garden."

"My brother is fond of meditation," said Mrs Bolter, quietly; and she looked very fixedly in the Princess's eyes.

"Yes, I suppose so; and night is so pleasant a time for thought," retorted the Princess. "You must come with your brother and the doctor, and stay with me, Mrs Bolter."

"Thank you, madam," replied the little lady. "Never, if I know it," she said to herself.

"I suppose it is late to English views?" said the Princess, smiling. "Good-bye, then, dear Miss Stuart. I will try and persuade papa to bring you to stay with me in my savage home. You really would come if he consented?"

"Indeed I should like it," said Grey, quickly, as she looked frankly in the Princess's handsome face, the latter kissing her affectionately at parting.

"Now we must say good-night to Perowne and our hostess," said the doctor, merrily. "Come along, my dear, and we'll soon be home. But I say, where are these people?"

Neither Helen nor Mr Perowne was visible; and the replies they received to inquiries were of the most contradictory character.

"There, do let us go, Dr Bolter," exclaimed the lady, with great asperity now. "No one will miss us; but if the Perownes do, we can apologise to-morrow or next day, when we see them."

"But I should have liked to say good-night," said the doctor. "Let's have one more look. I daresay Helen is down here."

"I daresay Captain Hilton knows where she is," said Mrs Doctor, sharply, and Grey gave quite a start.

"But I can't find Hilton, and I haven't seen Chumbley lately."

"Perhaps they have been sensible enough to go home to bed," said Mrs Doctor, after she had been dragged up and down several walks.

"Almost seems as if everybody had gone home to bed," said the doctor, rubbing his ear in a vexed manner. "Surely Perowne and Helen would not have gone to bed before the guests had left."

"Well, I'm going to take Grey Stuart home, Doctor," said the lady, decisively. "You can do as you like, but if the hostess cannot condescend to give up her own pleasure for her guests', I don't see why we should study her."

"Ah, here's Perowne," cried the doctor. "Good-night, old fellow. Thank you for a pleasant evening. We are just off. Where is Madam Helen?"

"Don't know; but don't wait for her," said Mr Perowne; and after a friendly leave-taking the party of three moved towards the gates, Mrs Doctor heaving a satisfied sigh as they went along.

They had to cross the lawn again, where a goodly group of guests yet remained; and as they passed, the Inche Maida smiled and kissed her hand to Grey, while the Rajah rose to see them to the gates.

"Not gone yet, Rajah?" said the doctor. "I say, how are you going to get home?"

"My boat is waiting. We like the night for a journey, and my rowers will soon take me back."

"And the Inche Maida, will she go back home to-night?"

"No; I think she is to stay here. Shall I go and ask her?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Mrs Doctor, "he does not want to know. Good-night, Rajah."

"Good-night—good-night."

They parted at the gate, and the Rajah returned to the lawn, staying with the remaining guests till they departed; he and the Inche Maida being about the last to leave—the latter being handed by Mr Perowne into her boat, for the Rajah was wrong—the Princess had not been invited to stay, and her strong crew of boatmen were very soon sending the long light naga swiftly up stream, the smoothly-flowing water breaking up into myriads of liquid stars, as it seemed to rush glittering along on either side while they progressed between the two black walls of foliage that ran up from the surface high in air, one mass of leafage, from which the lowermost branches kissed the stream.

Volume Two—Chapter Two.

Missing.

The hum of a mosquito was about the only sound to be heard in the Residency house, as, clad in silken pyjamas, Mr Harley lay sleeping easily upon his light bamboo bedstead, dimly seen through the thin gauzy curtains by the light of a well-subdued lamp.

The bedroom was furnished in the lightest and coolest way, with matting floor and sides, while jalousie shutters admitted the cool night air.

The Resident had been smoking, partly in obedience to a bad bachelor habit, partly to keep at bay that Macbeth of insects that haunts all eastern rooms, and tries so diligently to murder the sleep of the inoffensive and just.

The faint pungent odour of a good cigar still pervaded the room, and the extinct end was yet between Neil Harley's white teeth, as he lay there dreaming about Helen Perowne, seeing her admired and followed by all the single men at the station, while he was the only one who made no sign.

He sighed in his sleep, and then uttered a low moan, as if in spite of his placid face and show of indifference he suffered deeply on Helen's account; but a calm smile, well resembling indifference, rested upon his features, and seemed to say that, come what might, he was patiently waiting his time.

Then came a change, for the calmness seemed to be swept away by a gust of passion, and the strong man's hands clenched, his brow grew rugged, and as if suffering from some acute agony, the white teeth of the sleeper closed tightly with a sharp click, and a portion of the bitten-through cigar rolled from his lips on to the floor.

Then all was very still. The heat seemed to grow more intense, and the faint ripple of the river, as it glided by the island, could be distinctly heard. Now and then from the distant jungle some wild, uneasy cry rose upon the still air, riding as it were across the river like a warning to tell the slumbering Europeans that the savagery of the primeval forest lay close beside their civilisation; while the wakeful might have pondered on the fact that their safety rested solely upon the British *prestige*, and that a spark might ignite a train that would result in a terrible conflagration sufficient to sweep them all away.

Some such thoughts crossed the sleeping brain of Neil Harley that night, and his sleep grew more and more troubled as he thought how love-blinded he had been, and the risks they had run from Helen's treatment of the young Rajah.

The trouble had passed away now, but such another affair might result in ruin to them all; and yet he had allowed her to go on and trifle, looking on with assumed indifference, though his heart was stung the while.

Neil Harley's sleep again grew restful and calm; for in a pleasant dream he fancied that Helen, more beautiful than ever, had bidden him to her side, telling him that all her weak and wilful coquetry was but to try him. That she had loved him from the first, for he was the only man who had really touched her heart; and that, though she had fought against the restraint he had placed upon her, and told herself that she hated him and the way in which he had mocked at her trifling, she was his—his alone—that she resigned herself to his keeping—his keeping—that of the only man who could ever sway her heart.

The night grew hotter still, and the faint breath that was wafted between the open laths that covered the window seemed to have passed from the mouth of some furnace. A harsh roar came from the jungle, and then a loud plash or

two echoed over the surface of the stream, as some great reptile plunged in from the muddy bank.

Then all was very still once more for a time, till suddenly the faint splash-splash of oars was heard, seeming now to be coming nearer, now to be fading away, drowned by the shrill insect hum. Again it sounded nearer, and all doubt of its proceeding from a boat bound for the Residency island was ended by the loud challenge of the sentry at the landing-place.

Then came voices in reply, and once more the hum of the mosquitoes was all that could be heard: now low and deep, now shrill and angry.

The faint lapping of the river and the splash of oars had died away, and the silence and heat were painful enough to draw a low sigh from the sleeper, just as the bedroom door was softly opened, and a dark figure glided in, crept over the matting floor without making a sound, and bent over the bed.

For the moment it seemed as though he was there upon some errand of ill; and one who watched would have been ready to raise an alarm, the insecurity of the station life being sufficient to warrant such a supposition; but the idea of the dark figure being bent on an evil errand was at once destroyed, for after waiting for a moment, he cried, softly:

"Master—master!"

The Resident started up with the sudden awakening of a man accustomed to suspect peril at every turn, and his hand darted beneath his pillow even as he raised himself, to be withdrawn grasping the butt of a loaded revolver.

"Ah, you Ling," he said, with a sigh of relief, as he lowered his hand. "What is it? Someone ill?"

"Mr Perowne has come across in his boat, sir."

"Mr Perowne? at this time! what does he want?"

"To see you, sir."

"Tell him I'll be there directly." The Chinese servant glided away as silently as he had come, and the Resident hastily dashed some water in his face to clear away the sleepy feeling.

"I hope nothing serious!" he muttered. "Has Helen been taken ill?"

A pang shot through him at the thought, and the reckless behaviour of the night, that had stung him again and again during the course of the evening, was forgiven.

"Poor child!" he muttered. "I believe she loves me, and bird-like, is fluttering and timorously striving to escape from the string that holds her." He glanced at his watch as it hung upon a stand. "Two o'clock. I have not been in bed above an hour. What can be wrong?"

The next minute he was in the dining-room, where he found Mr Perowne agitatedly walking up and down; but as soon as the Resident entered he advanced and caught him fiercely by the arm. "Harley, do you know anything of this?" he cried.

"Of this? Of what?"

"Helen! Where is she?"

"Helen? In bed and asleep I hope. What do you mean?"

"I missed her somewhere about eleven. I have not seen her since."

The Resident looked curiously at Mr Perowne, whose flushed face and excited manner seemed to suggest that he had been playing the host too freely during the evening, and to his own deterioration in balance.

"Tired, and gone to bed. A bit peevish with weariness," suggested the Resident, who drove back a curious sense of uneasiness that troubled him.

"No," said Mr Perowne, hoarsely; "she has not gone to bed, and the house and the gardens have been searched again and again. Do you know anything of this?"

"! Absurd! I left in good time. I bade her good-night when she was talking to the chaplain; he was trying to persuade her to let him cover her shoulders with the shawl he carried."

The Resident ceased speaking to dwell for a moment upon the luminous look he had seen Helen bestow upon the chaplain—a look meant, he told himself, to annoy him, while he knew that it would give poor Rosebury food for sweet reflection during weeks to come.

"It is very strange," said Mr Perowne excitedly; and his haggard gaze was directed about the place, as if he half expected to find that Helen was there. "Where did you see her last, do you say?"

"Talking to Rosebury, and before then she was with Hilton. I fancy they were having words. Well, perhaps I ought hardly to say that; but Hilton was certainly remonstrating angrily."

"When was that?"

"Half-past ten or eleven; I cannot say for certain."

"Let us go and see Hilton," said Mr Perowne; "but stay. Am I to believe you, Harley?"

"As you please, Mr Perowne," said the Resident, with dignity. "Why should you doubt my word?"

"I do not doubt it!" cried Mr Perowne, catching his hand. "Pity me, Harley. I seem cold and strange; but I love that girl, and she is gone."

He gasped painfully as he spoke, but smiled sadly directly after as the Resident warmly grasped his hand.

"One minute," said the Resident; and hastily adding something to his clothing, he joined his visitor again, and the two sallied forth into the still, hot night, to make their way to the little fort, which was stronghold and barracks in one.

Here they were challenged by another sentry, for, peaceful times as they were, the military arrangements were always kept upon the sternest war footing.

"We want to see Captain Hilton," said Mr Harley, in his quick, commanding way.

"Captain's ashore, sir. He went to Mr Perowne's party."

"Yes, yes," said that gentleman; "we know: but he has come back."

"No, sir; not while I've been on guard—three hours, sir."

"Call the sergeant," said Mr Harley, sharply.

He needed no calling, for, hearing voices, he had come out to see who came so late.

"Where is Captain Hilton?"

"I thought he was stopping to sleep at Mr Perowne's, sir," said the sergeant, saluting. "Hasn't been back. Beg pardon, sir; didn't see it was Mr Perowne."

"But he left my house hours ago," said that gentleman.

"Gone to stay at Dr Bolter's, perhaps, sir," suggested the sergeant.

"Are you sure he did not return while your back was turned?" said Mr Harley.

"Quite sure, sir. Still, he might, sir; it's no use to be too sure. Like to go to his quarters, sir?"

"Yes, we'll go in," said the Resident, quickly; and following the sergeant, after exchanging glances, the two gentlemen entered Hilton's room.

The bed had not been pressed, and everything was in order, just as the regimental servant had placed it after his master had dressed to attend the evening *fête*.

"Mr Chumbley hasn't come back neither," said the sergeant.

"Not come back!" said the Resident, wondering. "This is strange. I don't know, though. They have gone to smoke a cigar with someone, and then decided to stay all night."

Mr Perowne shook his head, and the Resident felt that his explanation was not good, and both were silent as they walked back towards the entrance of the fort.

"What does this mean?" said Mr Perowne, at last.

"Can't say yet," replied the Resident, sharply. "Sergeant, have a look round, and make sure that Captain Hilton and Mr Chumbley have not come back."

"Yes, sir, I'll look round," said the sergeant; "but they couldn't have landed without the sentries knowing."

"Go and see," said the Resident, sternly; and the sergeant saluted and walked away.

"They must be staying somewhere," said the Resident, who suffered from the desire to keep back the question that so agitated his breast. "Depend upon it, they have gone to the doctor's to smoke a cigar."

He felt as he spoke that this was impossible; for he was sure that the hours kept at the doctor's were too regular for such a relapse.

"And my daughter?" said Mr Perowne, in a cold, stern voice.

"I'll have the men out to search if it is necessary," said the Resident, eagerly; "but before we proceed to such an extreme measure, had we not better make more inquiries? Yours is a large house and grounds. She may be back by now."

Neil Harley felt a strange choking sensation as he spoke, and he knew that his words were weak; but he clung to the hope that there was some mistake, and that Helen was by now safely at home.

"She may," said Mr Perowne, bitterly. "But it seems to me that there is some trick here. I gave you the credit of it at first."

"Am I a man so wanting in respect for Helen that I should insult her and you?"

"I—I can't help it, Harley!" groaned the father. "There seems to be no end to my troubles!"

The Resident looked at him sharply, for that evening he had seemed all life and gaiety.

"Yes, you may look!" groaned the unhappy man; "but everything goes wrong with me. There is, I am sure, some planned affair here; and I believe that Hilton is at the bottom of it."

"Do not be so ready to condemn, Perowne," said the Resident, quickly. "I feel sure that Hilton would be guilty of no rash, foolish escapade like this. It is absurd! Good heavens, man! do you think that Helen would degrade herself by eloping? I will not believe it!"

"I wish I could feel you were right," groaned the unhappy father.

"Why Chumbley is away too. It is like saying that he is implicated."

"He is Hilton's chosen companion," said Mr Perowne, sadly.

"Tut, man; we shall have to look farther afield than that."

"Then why are they not here to speak for themselves?" cried Mr Perowne, in a querulous, excited way. "Hilton has been constantly hanging about my place a great deal more than Helen liked, and she showed it to-night by completely turning her back upon him."

"But surely you do not think that Hilton—" began the Resident.

"I do not think anything," said Mr Perowne, angrily. "But here is the fact before us: my daughter is missing, and Captain Hilton has not returned to his quarters."

"Neither has Chumbley," said the Resident, uneasily.

"Neither has Chumbley," assented Mr Perowne.

"A man who, beneath his languid indifference, is the soul of honour," said the Resident; and he led the way to the boat by which Mr Perowne had come across.

The men were lying in the bottom asleep; but they roused up directly as the two gentlemen entered and were rowed to the landing-stage at the foot of Mr Perowne's garden, where the swift stream was lapping the stones placed to keep it from washing the lawn away.

As they were rowed across Neil Harley found himself looking thoughtfully down into the water time after time, and a curious shuddering sensation came upon him, one which he strove hard to cast off.

He could not, he would not believe it possible, he told himself; but in spite of his efforts, and the mastery he generally had over self, the thought would come.

They found the servants ready with the answer that nothing had been seen of their young mistress, though they had continued searching ever since their master had gone away.

"Shall we look round ourselves?" said Mr Perowne.

"No, if you say the house has been searched."

"I have been in every room myself."

"Then let us go on to the doctor's. We may find Hilton and Chumbley there, and they perhaps can throw some light upon the matter."

Mr Perowne bowed, and they hurried off to the doctor's pretty bungalow, a short distance away.

"They are not here, unless they are stopping to sleep."

"How do you know?"

"There is no light."

All the same the Resident tapped sharply at the door, and his summons was followed by a thump on the floor, as if someone had leaped out of bed.

The next moment a window was thrown open, and the doctor's voice was heard.

"Now then: who's ill?"

"Don't be alarmed, doctor," said the Resident.

"Oh, it's you, Harley. Had too much supper?"

"No, no. Tell me quickly. Did Hilton and Chumbley come home with you?"

"No; they went away ever so long before."

"Did you see them go?"

"No. Can't say I did."

"They have not been back to their quarters."

"Stopped to have a cigar somewhere."

"Perhaps so; but tell me, when did you see Hilton last?"

"I don't know. Oh, yes, I do. He went down towards the river, with a cigar in his mouth."

"When did you see my daughter?" said Mr Perowne.

"Oh! are you there, Perowne? Well, I don't know. Not for an hour before we came away."

"An hour and a half," said Mrs Bolter's voice. "We didn't see her when we came away."

"Did she go away with anyone, Mrs Bolter?" exclaimed Perowne, eagerly.

"No; I saw her walk towards the house by herself. I'll get up and dress directly. Perhaps I can do some good. The poor girl has been overcome by the heat, Bolter, and fainted away somewhere in the grounds. We'll both dress and come on directly, Mr Perowne. Have the shrubberies searched again. Henry, go and rouse up Arthur; he may be useful."

"Yes, call him," said the Resident; "he was seen with her last, and may know where she went."

Volume Two—Chapter Three.

In the Middle of the Night.

All Mrs Bolter's dislike to Helen vanished now that there was trouble on the way; and dressing hastily, she ran across the little bamboo landing to knock at her brother's door, but without receiving any answer, and knocking again sharply, she ran back to her own room to continue dressing.

She threw open the window to admit a few breaths of fresher air, and in the silence of the night she could hear the receding steps of their late visitors. Then turning sharply she found Dr Bolter yawning fearfully.

"Don't be so unfeeling, Henry!" she cried; "who knows what may have happened?"

"Unfeeling be hanged!" he said, tetchily. "I only yawned."

"And very rudely, Henry. You did not place your hand before your mouth."

"A yawn, Mrs Bolter," he said didactically, "is the natural effort made for ridding the system—"

"Of the effects of too much smoking and drinking," said Mrs Doctor, quickly. "There, do make haste and dress, and then call Arthur again. He does not seem to be moving. How soundly he sleeps. He did not hear us when we came home or he would have spoken."

"Oh, dear!" yawned the doctor. "I was just in my beauty sleep, and this calling me up is the heigh—hey—ho—ha—hum! Oh! dear me! I beg your pardon, my dear."

"Are you nearly ready, Henry?" said the lady, who would not notice the last most portentous yawn.

"Where the—"

"Henry!"

"I mean where are my studs? Oh! all right."

"Go and see if Arthur is awake, and tell him to get up directly."

The doctor went slowly and sleepily out of the door, fumbling with his studs the while; and without pausing to knock, walked straight into his brother-in-law's room.

"Here, Arthur, old man, rouse up!" he cried. "We're going on to—hullo! Here, Mary, he hasn't been to bed!" he shouted.

"Not been to bed!" cried the little lady. "Why, Arthur, you foolish—"

"He isn't here, my dear," said the doctor.

"But—but he was here when we came back, was he not?" said Mrs Bolter.

"I don't know; I only knocked at his door. I was too sleepy to speak, my dear."

"Oh! Henry," exclaimed Mrs Bolter, excitedly, "something must have happened, or dear Arthur would not have stopped away like this."

"I—I hope not," said the doctor. "There, be calm, my dear; we know nothing yet."

"Yes—yes, I will be calm," said the little lady, fighting hard to master her excitement; "but, Henry, if we have brought my poor brother over here to be the victim of some terrible accident, I shall never forgive myself."

"Oh, stuff—stuff!" cried the doctor, as they looked round the room to find that the bed had not been touched. "Don't jump at conclusions. What did Harley say?"

"That Arthur was seen last with Helen Perowne—in the garden, I suppose."

"What? Our Arthur was seen with her last? She missing—he missing—why, by jingo, Mary, that handsome puss has run away with him!"

The doctor burst into a hearty, chuckling laugh.

"Is this a time for jesting, Henry?" said Mrs Bolter, angrily.

"Not at all, my dear," replied the doctor, "only it looks as if Arthur had made up his mind to do something startling."

"Arthur—something startling! What do you mean?"

"That he seems to have bolted with Helen Perowne!"

"Henry!"

"Well, my dear, they were seen together last, and they are now missing. What is one to say?"

"If you cannot say words of greater wisdom than that, Henry, pray be silent."

"All right, my dear—come along."

But if the doctor was disposed to be silent, so was not his lady, who began to find out cause after cause for her brother's absence.

"Someone is ill, I'm sure, Henry, and Arthur has been summoned to the bedside."

"Nonsense! If anyone were ill," said the doctor, testily, "I should be sent for; and there is no one ill now, though we shall have half a dozen poorly to-morrow after that supper of Perowne's."

"Then some terrible accident has happened," said Mrs Bolter. "Arthur would never have stopped away like this without some special reason."

"Well, we shall see," said the doctor.

"Henry," said the lady, suddenly; and she came to a full stop.

"Yes, my dear."

"Do you think it likely that Helen Perowne—poor foolish girl—would do such a thing?"

"What, as to run off with Arthur?" chuckled the little doctor.

"For shame, Henry! I say do you think she is likely to have walked down to the river-side because it is cool and slipped in? There is not the slightest protection."

"No, my dear, I do not think anything of the sort," replied the doctor, angrily. "She is a deal more likely to be courting some coxcomb or another in a shady walk, and they have forgotten all about the time."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Mrs Bolter. "Absurd, eh? Why, that's what she is always thinking about. How many fellows has she been flirting with since we knew her?"

"I am waiting for you, Dr Bolter," said the lady, austere, "and I must say that I think your words are very unfeeling indeed."

"I'll bleed her if she has fainted!" said the doctor, grimly. "I should like to bleed that girl, old-fashioned as the notion is! If I don't, I'll give her such a dosing as she shan't forget in a hurry—calling a fellow up like this!"

They hurried out into the star-lit night, with everything seeming hushed and strange. The trees whispered low from time to time; then came a sullen splash from the river, as if some huge creature had just plunged in. Once or twice came a peculiar, weird-sounding cry from the jungle—one which made Mrs Doctor forget her annoyance with her husband and creep close to his side. Just then they heard hurried footsteps. "Did you bring your pistols with you, dear?" whispered Mrs Bolter.

"No," he said, sharply; "I've got a rhubarb draught, a bottle of chlorodyne, the sal-volatile, and a lancet. That will be

enough. Think I meant to shoot the girl?"

"Don't be absurd, dear! Take care, there is someone coming."

"Another call for me!" grumbled the doctor, sleepily. "That's the effect of giving parties in a hot climate. Hullo!"

"Yes, doctor," said a familiar voice.

"Oh! it's you two. Well have you found her all right?"

"We've been to Stuart's," said the Resident, sharply.

"Well, what news?"

"They have not seen or heard of either of them," replied the Resident.

"Do you know that my—"

"Oh, hush!" whispered Mrs Doctor, excitedly, "you had better not—"

"Why, they must know it, my dear," he whispered back. "It is of no use to hide anything."

"I did not understand you, doctor," said the Resident.

"I say that my brother-in-law, Rosebury, has not been home."

"The chaplain!" cried Mr Harley, and he stopped short upon the path.

"Hasn't been home," continued the doctor. "They've all gone in somewhere. Who else is away?"

"Hilton and Chumbley."

"Oh, it's all right. They're somewhere; but it's very foolish of them to frighten some people and rouse others up like this," said the doctor.

"I hope we shall find a pleasant solution of what is at present a mystery," said the Resident. "Mrs Bolter, it is very kind of you to come," he added, warmly.

"Yes; I thank you too," said Perowne, in a dreamy, absent way. "It is very strange; but where is Miss Stuart?"

"Stuart said she was asleep," said the Resident.

"Oh, to be sure. Yes; I remember," said Mr Perowne.

"We took her safely home," said Mrs Bolter, quickly.

They had not far to go to the gates of the merchant's grounds, but it seemed to all to be a long and dreary walk past the various dark houses of the European and native merchants, not one of which gave any token of the life within.

The gates were open, and they walked over the gritting gravel to where the door stood, like the windows of the bungalow, still open, and a lamp or two were yet burning in the grounds, one of which paper lanterns, as they approached, caught fire, and blazed up for a moment and then hung, a few shreds of tinder, from a verdant arch.

It was a mere trifle, but it seemed like a presage of some trouble to the house, seen as it was by those who approached, three of the party being in that unreal, uncomfortable state suffered by all who are roused from their sleep to hear that there is "something wrong."

The servants looked soared as they entered, and announced that they had been looking, as they expressed it, "everywhere" without success.

Lanterns were lit and a thorough exploration of the grounds followed, the only result being that a glove was found—plainly enough one that had been dropped by someone walking near the river.

That was all, and the night passed with the searchers awaking everyone they knew in turn, but to obtain not the slightest information; and daybreak found the father looking older and greyer by ten years as he stood in his office facing the Resident, the doctor, and Mrs Bolter, and asking what they should do next.

"We must have a thorough daylight search," said Mr Harley. "Then the boatmen must all be examined. It hardly appears probable, but Hilton and Chumbley may have proposed a water trip. It seems to us now, cool and thoughtful, a mad proposal, but still it is possible."

"Yes, and Helen would not go without my brother to take care of her," said Mrs Bolter, triumphantly, for she had been longing for some explanation of her brother's absence, and this was the first that offered.

"Oh, no, Mary," said the doctor, crushing her hopes as he shook his head.

"No, Mrs Bolter," said the Resident, slowly; and he seemed to be speaking and thinking deeply the while. "I am sure Miss Perowne could not be guilty of so imprudent an act."

"No," said her father, speaking now more boldly and without reserve. "You are right, Harley. Helen loves admiration,

but she would not have compromised herself in such a way, neither would Mr Rosebury have given such an act his countenance."

The Resident raised his head as if to speak, and then remained silent.

"What are you thinking, Harley," said the doctor.

"Yes, pray speak out," cried Mrs Bolter. "I am sure we are all only too anxious to find some comfort."

"I was thinking of what could have happened to them, for depend upon it they are all together."

"Yes," said Mr Perowne; "but you were thinking more than that."

"I must think," said the Resident. "I cannot say anything definite now."

"Then I know what it is," cried Mrs Bolter.

"Will you kindly speak out, madam?" said the old merchant, harshly.

"I should be sorry to accuse falsely," said Mrs Bolter, excitedly; "but I was warned of this, and I can't help thinking that someone else is at the bottom of this night's work."

"And who's that?" said the doctor, quickly.

Mrs Bolter was silent.

"Rajah Murad, you mean," said the doctor, quickly; "and he has been waiting his time."

"And now strikes at us like a serpent in the dark!" cried Mr Perowne, angrily. "It is the Malay character all over. Heaven help me! My poor girl!"

Volume Two—Chapter Four.

Mrs Barlow.

Mr Perowne's house was literally besieged the next morning, for the news of the disappearance ran through the little community like wildfire. British and native communities were equally excited; and after snatching an hour's rest at the imperative command of his wife, the doctor was hastily swallowing some breakfast previous to going back to Mr Perowne's, but could hardly get on for interruptions.

"I am not alarmed, Henry," said the little lady, in a quiet, decided way; "and I insist upon your being properly fortified before unduly exerting yourself. I could not bear for you to be ill."

The words were said very quietly, but in such a tone that Dr Bolter set down his cup, and rising, left his place, and tenderly embraced the earnest little woman he had made his wife.

"I will take all the care I can, my dear Mary," he said.

"I know you will, Henry," said the little lady, whose lip quivered slightly as she spoke; "but now go and finish your breakfast, and then start. Don't be uneasy about me, dear, but go and do what you think best under the circumstances."

"I will, my love—I will," said Dr Bolter, with his mouth full of toast.

"It all sounds very alarming, dear, but I cannot help thinking that it will be explained in a very simple manner."

"I hope so."

"You see there are four of them; and as Arthur is one, I think we may feel assured."

"Well, my dear these are business times," said the doctor, "and we must speak in business ways. Arthur is the best old fellow in the world; but I am sorry to say that he is a terrible old woman."

"Henry!" said the lady, reproachfully.

"Well, my dear, he is. Now, would you have much confidence in him if it were a case of emergency?"

"I—I think I would sooner trust to you, Henry," said the little lady, softly; "but do make haste and get a good breakfast. If you want me, send a message, and I will come directly."

"All right," said the doctor, rising once more. "Now I'm off."

"But one moment, Henry," said the little lady, whose feelings now got the upper hand. "Tell me, dear—do you think anything dreadful has happened?"

"What do you call dreadful, my dear?" said the doctor, cheerily.

"That the crocodiles—"

She did not finish, but looked imploringly at her lord.

“Bah!—stuff!—nonsense! No, Mary, I don’t.”

“Then that this dreadful Rajah has carried them off?”

“If it had only been Madam Helen, I should have felt suspicious; but what could he want with Hilton and Chumbley, or with our Arthur?”

“To marry them,” suggested Mrs Bolter.

“Stuff! my dear, not he. If Murad had carried her off, he would not have bothered about a parson.”

“But Arthur was waiting about her all the evening.”

“So he was, my dear.”

“And he may have killed Hilton and poor Mr Chumbley, while they were defending her.”

“Yes, he might, certainly,” said the doctor, drily; “but how the—”

“Henry!”

“I only meant dickens. I say how the dickens he was going to carry her off when he was at the party all the time I can’t see.”

“But was he?”

“To the very last. Oh! it will all settle itself into nothing, unless Arthur has taken Helen off into the jungle and married her himself, with Hilton and Chumbley for witnesses.”

“Is this a time for joking, Henry?” said the little lady, reproachfully.

“Really, my dear, it would be no joke if Arthur had his own way.”

“I’m afraid,” sighed little Mrs Bolter, “that Helen Perowne had a good deal to do with my brother accepting the chaplaincy.”

“I’m sure she had,” chuckled the doctor.

“If I had thought so I would never have consented to come,” said the lady with asperity.

“Wouldn’t you, Mary? Wouldn’t you?” said the little doctor, taking her in his arms; and the lady withdrew her words just as a step was heard outside.

“Here’s another stoppage,” cried the doctor, impatiently. “Why, it’s Mrs Barlow. What does she want?”

Mrs Barlow was a widow lady of about forty, the relict of a well-to-do merchant of the station, who, after her widowhood, preferred to stay and keep her brother’s house to going back to England; at any rate, as she expressed it, for a few years.

She was one of the set who visited at Mr Perowne’s, and had also been at the trip up the river to the Inche Maida’s home; but being a decidedly neutral-tinted lady, in spite of her black attire, she was so little prominent that mention of her has not been necessary until now.

“Stop a minute;” she exclaimed, excitedly, as she arrested the doctor on his step.

“Not ill, are you, Mrs Barlow?” queried the doctor.

“Not bodily, doctor,” she began, “but—”

“My wife is inside, my dear madam,” cried the doctor, “and I must be off.”

“Stop!” exclaimed Mrs Barlow, authoritatively; and she took the little doctor’s arm, and led him back into the breakfast-room. “You are his brother, Dr Bolter. Mrs Bolter, you are his sister, ma’am. I can speak freely to you both.”

“Of course, madam, of course,” said the doctor; and then to himself, “Has the woman been taking *very strong* tea?”

“I have only just learned the terrible news, Dr Bolter—Mrs Bolter,” cried the lady, “and I came on to you.”

“Very kind of you I am sure, ma’am.”

“What do you think, doctor? You have some idea.”

“Not the least at present, ma’am. I was just off to see.”

“That is good of you; but tell me first,” cried the widow, half hysterically. “You do not—you cannot think—that that dreadful woman—”

“What, the Inche Maida, ma’am?”

"No, no! I mean Helen Perowne—has deluded him into following her away to some other settlement."

"Whom, ma'am, Hilton or Chumbley?"

"Oh, dear me, no, doctor; I mean dear Mr Rosebury."

"Oh, you mean dear Mr Rosebury, do you?" said the doctor.

"Yes, Dr Bolter; oh, yes. Tell me; do you think that dreadful girl has deluded him away?"

"No, ma'am, I don't," cried the doctor, stoutly. "Hang it all, no! I'd give her the credit of a good deal, but not of that. Hang it, no."

"Thank you, doctor," said the lady hysterically. "Of course I should have forgiven it, and set it all down to her; but you do me good, doctor, by assuring me that my surmise is impossible. What do you think then?"

"That it's all a mystery for us to find out, and I was going to hunt it up when you stopped me, ma'am."

"Excuse me, Mrs Barlow," said little Mrs Bolter, who had been fidgeting about, and waiting for an opportunity to speak, "but will you kindly explain what you mean by your very particular allusions to my brother?"

"Must I?" said the lady, with a martyred look.

"If you please, ma'am," said Mrs Bolter, sternly; and the little lady looked as if she were ready to apply the moral thumbscrews and the rack itself to the visitor if she did not make a clean breast.

"Do you not know?" whispered Mrs Barlow, with a pathetic look, and a timidly bashful casting down of the eyes.

"No, ma'am, I do not," said little Mrs Bolter, haughtily.

"I thought you must have known," sighed the lady. "But under these circumstances, when he may be in terrible peril, perhaps crying aloud, 'Rosina, come to my aid,' why should I shrink from this avowal? I am *not* ashamed to own it. Ah, Dr Bolter—oh, Mrs Bolter—I have loved him from his first sermon, when he looked down at me and seemed to address me with that soft, impressive voice which thrilled the very fibres of my heart, and now he is gone—he is gone! What does it mean! What shall we do?"

"Mary, you'd better administer a little sal-volatile, my dear," said the doctor. "You know the strength; I'm off."

The doctor backed out of the room, leaving Mrs Barlow sobbing on the sofa, and hurried off in the direction of the Residency, talking to himself on the way.

"This is something fresh!" he muttered; "and it isn't leap-year either. Rum creatures women! I wonder what Mary is saying to her now! Here, paddle me across," he said to one of the natives who was cleaning out his sampan ready for any passengers who might want to be put across to the island.

As he neared the landing-stage, he found Mr Harley anxiously busy despatching boat after boat up and down stream, each boat being paddled by a couple of friendly natives, and containing a noncommissioned officer and private selected for their intelligence.

"Ah! that's right, Harley!" said the doctor, rubbing his hands after a friendly salute, and the information given and taken that there was not the slightest news of the missing people. "But don't you think we ought to take some steps ashore?"

"Wait a moment; let me ease my mind by getting these fellows off," said the Resident hoarsely; and he gave the men the strictest injunctions to carefully search the banks of the river, and also to closely question every Malay they met as to whether anything of the missing party had been seen. Eight boats had been sent off upon this mission, the men accepting the task readily enough, irrespective of the promise of reward; and hardly had the last been despatched, when the Resident proposed that they should go across to Mr Perowne's.

"It is only fair to consult him as to our next proceedings," said the Resident, gloomily; and almost in silence they were paddled across to the mainland, and went up to the scene of last night's festivities, where everything looked dismal and in confusion. Half-burnt lanterns hung amidst the trees, tables and chairs were piled up anyhow in the grounds, and the lawn was strewn with the *débris* of the feast yet uncleared away, the attention of the servants having been so much occupied with their search.

The two new-comers found Mr Perowne quite prostrate with this terrible anxiety, and Mr Stuart trying, with his daughter, to administer some little consolation in the way of hope.

"Cheer up, mon!" the old Scot was saying. "I daresay she'll turn up all right yet."

Mr Perowne looked at him so reproachfully that the old Scot paused and then turned uneasily away.

"Poor wretch!" he muttered; "he has trouble eneuch—enough I mean."

"Ah! Harley, what news?" cried Mr Perowne.

"None as yet," was the reply.

"Have you sent out boats?"

"Yes, eight; and let us hope that they will discover something."

"But you do not think they will?"

The Resident was silent.

"Harley here thinks that the Rajah is at the bottom of it all," said the doctor.

"Impossible!" cried the unhappy father. "He was here when she was missed, or I might have suspected him. I fear it is something worse than even that."

"I cannot help my suspicions," said the Resident, quietly. "Perhaps I wrong him."

"I think ye do, Harley," said the old Scot. "I saw him here long after Miss Helen must have been gone. I'm thinking she and the young officers have taken a boat and gone down the river for a wee bit of game, seeing the night was fine."

"Oh! papa," cried Grey, "I am sure Helen would not have been so imprudent."

"I'm sure it's very kind of ye to think so well o' your schoolfellow, but I'm no' so sure. Trust me, the Rajah had no hand in the matter."

"He has plenty of servants who would work his will," said the Resident, thoughtfully; "but this charge of mine must not go forth to Murad's ears. If I am wronging an innocent man, we shall have made a fresh enemy; and Heaven knows we have enough without that!"

"You may be right," said the doctor, "but I have my doubts."

"He's wrong," said old Stuart. "He's not the man with the spirit in him to do so stirring a thing."

"And he would never take off those two young fellows and my brother-in-law."

"I begin to think he has," said Perowne, snatching at the solution once more, after holding the opinion and casting it off a dozen times. "He has never forgiven her for her refusal. Are we to sit still under his insult, Harley? You have plenty of men under your command."

"True," said the Resident; "but should I be justified in calling them out and making a descent on Murad's town upon the barest suspicion?"

Suggestion after suggestion was offered, as the reason of the Resident's remark was fully realised; but as time went on the little knot of English people more fully than ever realised how helpless they were in the midst of the Malays, whose good offices they were compelled to enlist.

Volume Two—Chapter Five.

A New Phase.

The meeting was soon after strengthened by the arrival of Mrs Bolter and the principal ladies of the little community, when before long it became evident that Helen Perowne's behaviour had made the ladies of one mind.

Their sole idea was that which found vent at last from the lips of Mrs Bolter, who, after a good deal of pressing as to her belief, gave it:

"I am very sorry to express my feelings upon the subject," she said, "and perhaps I am prejudiced; but I cannot help thinking that Miss Perowne has eloped with Captain Hilton, and Lieutenant Chumbley has gone with them to save appearances."

"That doesn't account for Rosebury's disappearance, my dear," said the doctor, rather tartly, for he was annoyed at his wife's decided tone.

"I am sorry to say that Miss Perowne," continued the lady, "had gained a great deal of influence over my brother, and I daresay he would have acquiesced in anything she wished him to do."

"I am quite sure you are wronging Helen, and Mr Rosebury as well!" cried Grey Stuart, suddenly. "Mrs Bolter, these words of yours are cruel in the extreme!"

"Maybe, my dear," said Mrs Bolter, tightening her lips.

"And I am sure," cried Grey, "that Captain Hilton would never have taken such a step; while Lieutenant Chumbley would have been the first to call it madness!"

"And who made you their champion, miss?" cried old Stuart, sharply.

"I only said what I thought was right, papa," said Grey, with no little dignity. "I could not stand by and hear Helen accused of so great a lapse of duty without a word in her defence."

"And I am sure, from her father to the humblest here," said the Resident, taking Grey's hand and kissing it, "we all

honour you for your sentiments, Miss Stuart. And now, Mrs Bolter," he continued, turning to the doctor's wife, "as we have heard your belief, let me ask you, as a sensible woman, whether you think such an assertion can be true."

"I don't see why you should take up the cudgels so fiercely on Miss Perowne's behalf, Mr Harley," said the little lady, quietly.

"That is beside the question," he retorted, "and I ask you again, do you think this true?"

"I told you beforehand, Mr Harley," replied the lady, "that I was no doubt very much prejudiced, and I believe I am; but I am at least frank and plain, and repeat, that after due consideration it does wear that aspect to me."

"Speak out, Mrs Bolter, please," said the father. "I will have no reservations."

"It is a time, Mr Perowne, when I feel bound to speak out, and without reservation. I grieve to say that Miss Perowne's whole conduct has been such as to lead any thoughtful woman to believe that what I say is true."

There was a murmur of assent here from the ladies present.

"You are in the minority, Miss Stuart," said the Resident, gravely, as he turned to Grey, who, pale of face and red-eyed, was now and again casting reproachful glances at the severe-looking little lady, "and I thank you for what you have said."

"I'm beginning to think myself that the wife is right," said Dr Bolter. "She tells me she has been making inquiries amongst the Malay women—many of whom we know from their coming up to our house for help. They are very friendly towards us; and if there was anything in the Murad theory they would have known, and let it out. You are wrong, my dear. I'm afraid you are wrong."

Grey raised her eyes to the doctor's with quite a fierce look, and she turned red and pale by turns ere she answered, loyally:

"No, I am not wrong. Helen would not have been guilty of such an act. I know her too well. Neither," she added, in a lower voice, "would Captain Hilton."

"Brave little partisan," said the Resident, sadly. "You and I will fight all Helen Perowne's detractors. As you say," he cried, raising his voice, and a warm flush showing through his embrowned skin, "it is impossible!"

Mr Perowne had been called from the room before the discussion assumed quite so personal a nature, and now he returned, gazing piteously from one to the other as he was asked whether there was any news.

"This suspense is terrible!" he moaned. "Harley, Bolter, pray do something! My poor child!—my poor child!"

There was a sympathetic silence in the now crowded room, as the occupants waited for one of the gentlemen to speak, Dr Bolter looking at his wife, as if to ask, "What shall I say?" and receiving for response a shake of the head.

"The Rajah must, I am sure," cried Mr Perowne, "be at the bottom of this terrible affair. Mr Harley!" he cried, passionately, "I can bear this no longer, and I insist—I demand of you, as one of her Majesty's representatives—that you send troops up to the village at once!"

"I have thought of all this, Mr Perowne," said the Resident, "but that would be a declaration of war, and I should not feel justified in taking such a step without authority from the Governor."

"I do not care!" cried the father, frantically. "War or no war, I demand that, instead of waiting in this cold-blooded way, you have the place searched! This outrage must be due to the Rajah!"

There was a low hum of excitement in the room, as all eagerly watched for the Resident's reply to what seemed to be, but was not—a just demand.

"I would gladly do as you wish, Mr Perowne," he replied, "the more readily because it is what my heart prompts; but I must have some good grounds—stronger than mere suspicion—before I can do more than ask the aid of Murad, who is, as you know, a friendly Prince. Again, I must ask you to consider my position here, and my stringent instructions to keep on good terms with this Rajah. Recollect, sir, once again, to do what you propose would be interpreted by the Malays as an act of war. I have the whole community to study as well as your feelings, sir—as well," he added, in a low voice, only heard by Grey Stuart, "as my own."

"But my child—my child!" groaned Mr Perowne.

"I have done what I could, sir; sent messengers at once to Murad asking his aid, and whether any of his people can give us help."

"You did not accuse him then?" said Mr Stuart.

"How could I, sir, on suspicion? No, I have done what is best."

"But it is horrible!" cried Mr Perowne. "The thought of her being in the power of this unprincipled man is more than I can bear."

"But we do not know, sir, that this is the case, whatever our suspicions may be."

"I think they are wrong," cried Mrs Bolter, quickly, "for here comes someone to tell us who is right."

She pointed through the window as she spoke, and every head was turned to see the Rajah come hurrying up the pathway leading to the house, his steps seeming to partake of the excitement of the whole group, as he dashed up to the door; and as soon as he was admitted he half ran into the midst of the silent assembly, gazing wildly from face to face, till his eyes rested upon Mr Perowne, to whom he ran, threw his arms over his shoulders, and exclaimed with a passionate, half-sobbing cry:

“Tell me—quick! Tell me it is not true!”

Volume Two—Chapter Six.

A Prince's Anger.

The merchant stared in the young Rajah's convulsed face without speaking, and Murad exclaimed:

“I had heard news, and was coming down. Then came the messengers; but tell me,” he cried, “I cannot bear it! This is not true?”

Mr Perowne gazed fixedly in the dark, lurid eyes before him, as if fascinated by their power, and then said sternly:

“It is quite true, sir; quite true.”

“No, no!” cried the Malay Rajah, excitedly, “not true that she is gone; not true that she cannot be found?”

“Yes, sir,” repeated the merchant again, in a low, troubled voice. “She was taken from us last night.”

The Rajah uttered some words in his own tongue that sounded like a passionate wail, as he staggered back, as if struck heavily, reeled, clutched at the nearest person to save himself, and then fell with a crash upon the floor.

The little party assembled crowded round the prostrate man; but at a word from Dr Bolter they drew back, and he went down on one knee beside the young man to loosen his collar.

“A little more air. Keep back, please!” said the doctor, sharply. “Mary, a glass of water.”

As Mrs Bolter filled a glass from a carafe upon the sideboard, the doctor took a bottle of strong salts offered by one of the ladies present, and held it beneath the young man's nostrils, but without the slightest effect.

Then the water was handed to the doctor, who liberally used it about the young Prince's face, as the Resident drew near and gazed upon the prostrate figure, keenly noting the clayey hue of the face and the great drops of dank perspiration that stood upon the brow.

“What is it, doctor?” he whispered.

“Fainting—over-excitement,” replied Dr Bolter. “He's coming round.”

The fact was beginning to be patent to all, for a change was coming over the young man's aspect, and he began to mutter impatiently as the drops of water were sprinkled upon his face, opening his eyes at last and gazing about him in a puzzled way, as if he could not comprehend his position.

Then his memory seemed to come back with a flash, and he started up into a sitting position, muttered a few Malay words in a quick, angry manner, sprang to his feet, and then, with his eyes flashing, he snatched his kris from the band of his sarong, showing his teeth and standing defiant, ready to attack some enemy with the flame-shaped blade that was dully gleaming in his hand.

“Come, Rajah,” said the doctor, soothingly, “be calm, my dear sir. You are among friends.”

“Friends!” he cried, hoarsely. “No: enemies! You have let him take her away, I know,” he hissed between his teeth; “but you shall tell me. Who else has gone?”

“Captain Hilton,” said the doctor.

“Yes, I was sure,” hissed the Malay. “He was always there at her side. I was ref—fused; but I cannot sit still and see her stolen away by another, and I will have revenge—I will have revenge!”

The Malay Prince's aspect told plainly enough that he would have sprung like a wild beast at his enemy's throat had he been present; and saving Mrs Bolter and Grey, who stood holding her hand, the ladies crowded together, one or two shrieking with alarm as the Resident quietly advanced to the young Malay.

“Put up your weapon, sir,” he said firmly. “We are not savages. Recollect that you are amongst civilised people now.”

The Rajah turned upon him with so fierce and feline a look that Grey Stuart turned paler than she already was, and pressed Mrs Bolter's hand spasmodically; but Harley did not shrink, he merely fixed the young man as it were with his eyes, before whose steady gaze the sullen, angry glare of the young Prince sank, and he stood as if turned to stone.

“Yes,” he said, in a guttural voice; “you are right;” and slowly replacing his kris in its sheath, he covered the hilt with his silken plaid before standing there with his brows knit, and the veins in his temples standing out as if he were engaged in a heavy struggle to master the savage spirit that had gained the ascendant.

"That is better," said the Resident, quietly. "Now we can talk like sensible men."

"Yes," replied the Rajah; "but it is hard—very hard. It masters me, and I feel that I cannot bear it. You know what I have suffered, and how I fought it down. Mr Harley, Mr Perowne, did I not act like an English gentleman would have done?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr Perowne, hastily.

"I tried so hard that I might," he whispered. "I was born a Malay; but I am trying to become more like you. I thought I had mastered everything; but when I hear this news it is too much for me, and—Mr Harley—doctor—give me something to make me calm, or I shall go mad."

He turned away and stood for a few moments with his back to them, while the party assembled whispered their thoughts till the young man turned once more, and they saw that his face was calm and impassive, as if no furious storm of rage had just been agitating its surface.

"What are you going to do?" he said, in a low, deep voice, gazing from Mr Perowne to the Resident and back again.

"Search, sir, until we have found the lady," said the latter, quietly.

"I will help," said the Rajah; whose eyes emitted a flash that told of the rage in his heart.

"Thank you," said the Resident, quietly.

"You will pursue them?" continued the Rajah. "Tell me, by your laws do you kill this man for what he has done?"

"We do not think there is any need of pursuit, sir," replied Mr Harley, quietly; "we fear that there has been an accident."

"I have brought down two nagas, and two smaller boats," cried the Rajah, eagerly. "There are a hundred of my people waiting. Shall I send them to follow, or will you give them your commands? They are your slaves until this is done."

The Resident stood thinking for a minute or two, and the Rajah turned from him impatiently.

"We lose time!" he cried, angrily. "Mr Perowne, you do not speak. Tell me—you are her father—what shall I do?"

Mr Perowne held out his hand, which the Rajah seized.

"Thank you, Rajah," he said simply; "but we must be guided by wisdom in what we do. Mr Harley will speak directly. He is trying to help us. I cannot say more," he faltered. "I am crushed and helpless under this blow."

"Tut, mon! don't give way!" whispered old Stuart, going to his side. "Keep a stout haire and all will be well."

A couple of hours of indecision passed away, for the coming of the Rajah had thrown them off the track. They had had one scent to follow, and, however blindly, they were about to attempt it, but were now thrown back upon two other lines—the one being the suggestion of an accident; the other of elopement.

The hot day was wearing on, and the boatmen were returning boat by boat, but without the slightest information, not even a vague suggestion upon which hope could be hung. Still, nothing more had been done—nothing seemed possible under the circumstances; and a general feeling of despondency was gathering over the little community, when a new suspicion dawned in the Resident's mind, and he blamed himself for not having thought of it before.

The suspicion had but a slight basis, still it was enough; and eager as he was to find something to which he could cling, Neil Harley felt for the moment glad of the mental suggestion, and felt that all idea of some terrible boat accident might be set aside, for at last he had found the clue.

Volume Two—Chapter Seven.

No False Scent.

Neil Harley's new suspicion, one which he was cautious not to mention as yet, was that, in accordance with the Malay character, this revengeful blow had come from one who owed the English community or Government a grudge.

The Rajah had been the first to suffer from suspicion, but his coming had cleared him somewhat in the eyes of his friends; still there was one who might well feel enmity against the English for the part they had played, and this was one who had not been to clear herself from suspicion.

The Inche Maida had come to the Residency island humbly with her petition—a reasonable suppliant for help against her enemies. She had had her request, if not refused, at all events treated with official neglect. It was no wonder, then, that she should feel aggrieved, and, while wearing the mask of friendship, take some steps to obtain mental satisfaction for the slight.

The Resident pondered upon all this, and felt that she must naturally be deeply wounded. She had borne her disappointment with the patience and stoicism of one of her religion; but all the same she might have been waiting for an opportunity to strike.

"Allah's will be done!" she had said at their last interview, when the Resident had made a further communication from Government; and she had bent her head and sighed deeply as she turned to go away, but only to return, shake hands with Mr Harley, and thank him.

"You are a good man, Mr Harley," she had said, "and I know you would have helped me if you could."

"Yes, she has been most friendly ever since," he mused, "and her behaviour last night at the party was all that could have been desired."

Still, he argued, she was a Malay, and all this might have been to serve as a blind to her future acts. She must feel very bitter, and, with all an Eastern's cunning, she must have been nursing up her wrath till an opportunity occurred for revenge.

This, perhaps, would be that revenge.

"No," he said, "it was childish;" and he felt directly after that he was maligning a really amiable woman.

He ended by thinking that he could judge her by her acts. If she were innocent of all complicity in the abduction of Helen—if abduction it was—she would come and display her sympathy to her English friends in this time of trouble.

"What do you think, Miss Stuart?" he said, leading her into the opening of a window. "The Inche Maida has cause of complaint against us. Do you think she has had anything to do with getting Helen away?"

"No, I'm certain she has not," cried Grey, flushing warmly. "She is too good and true a woman."

"Do you think she likes Helen?" asked the Resident.

"No, I think she dislikes her," replied Grey; "but she could not be guilty of such a crime as you suggest."

"I am suspicious," said the Resident. "Why does she stay away? She must have heard something by this time. Did you see her very late last night?"

"Yes, till very late—till after the disappearance. She was wondering where Helen had gone."

"Yes," said the Resident, "that is all in her favour, my dear child; but still she stops away."

"No," said Grey, quietly, "she is not staying away. See: here she comes, with her servants. I think she has arrived to offer her services in this time of trouble."

Grey Stuart was right, for directly after the Malay princess entered the large drawing-room, eager with her offers of help, as her English friend had said.

"I did not know till a messenger came in," she exclaimed, excitedly. "I was home late, and I was asleep. When I heard of the trouble at the station, I came and brought my servants. What shall I do?"

She was most affectionate and full of pity for Mr Perowne. To the Resident she was friendly in the extreme, and in a frank, genial way, utterly free from effusiveness; while to Grey Stuart she was tenderness itself, kissing her and talking to her in a low voice of the trouble, and keeping her all the time at her side.

"Henry," said little Mrs Bolter, suddenly.

"Yes, my dear."

"I don't trust these black people a bit. They are very friendly and full of offers of service, but I cannot help thinking that they are at the bottom of all this trouble. Do you hear?"

"Yes, my dear, I hear," said the doctor; "but I cannot say that you are right. It's as puzzling as the real site of Ophir; but I hope it will all come right in the end."

Suspicious as Mrs Bolter felt, she did not show her feelings, but joined in the conversation; and she was obliged to own that the conduct of the Inche Maida seemed to be quite that of an English lady eager to help her friends in a terrible time of trial.

In the midst of the conversation that ensued there was the sound of voices outside, and the Resident, closely followed by Mr Perowne and the Rajah, hurried out to see if there was any news.

One of the sergeants, with a private of Hilton's company, had just arrived on the lawn, these being two of the men who had gone down the river in a sampan.

"Ah! Harris," exclaimed the Resident, eagerly, on seeing something in the sergeant's face which told of tidings, "what news?"

The sergeant glanced at Mr Perowne in rather a troubled manner, and hesitated.

"Speak out, my man, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed the latter, "and let me know the worst."

"It mayn't be the worst, sir," replied the sergeant, with rough sympathy. "I hope it isn't, sir; but we found a boat, sir—one of our own boats—left by the 'Penguin' for our use at the island."

"Yes—yes, I know!" exclaimed Mr Perowne.

"Quick! speak out, Harris. What of her?" cried the Resident.

"She was lying bottom up, sir, on a bit of sandbank, a dozen miles down the river, sir; and this was twisted round one of the thwarts—the sleeve just tied round, sir, to keep it in its place."

As he spoke he held up a light coat, saturated with water, and muddy and crumpled, where it had dried on the way back.

Neil Harley took the coat and examined it carefully. Then laying it down, he said, slowly:

"It looks like Chumbley's; but I cannot feel sure."

"I made sure it was one of the lieutenant's coats, sir," said the sergeant, respectfully.

"Let us see the boat," said Mr Perowne. "Where is it?"

"Down at your landing-stage, sir, and—"

He stopped short, as if afraid he should say too much.

"What is it, Harris? Speak out," said the Resident, sternly.

"She seems to have been laid hold of, sir, by one of them great river beasts. There's a lot of teeth marks, and a bit ripped out of her side."

Mr Perowne shuddered, and Neil Harley recalled the various stories he had heard of crocodiles attacking small boats—stories that he had heretofore looked upon as mythical, though he knew that the reptiles often seized the natives when bathing by the river bank.

"As far as I could judge, sir," said the sergeant, who, seeing that he gave no offence in speaking out, was most eager to tell all he knew, "it seems as if the officers, sir, had taken the ladies for a row upon the river, when the boat perhaps touched one of the great beasts, and that made it turn and seize it in its teeth. Then it was upset, and—"

The men started and stopped short, for there was a faint cry of horror, and they all turned to see Grey Stuart standing there pale, with her lips apart, and a look of horror in her fixed eyes, as she saw in imagination the overturned boat, and the vain struggles of those who were being swept away by the rapid stream.

The whole scene rose before her eyes with horrible substantiality—all that she had heard or been told of the habits of the great reptiles that swarmed in the river helping to complete the picture. For as she seemed to realise the scene, and saw the struggling figures in the water, there would be a rush and a swirl, with a momentary sight of a dark horny back or side, and then first one and then another of the hapless party would be snatched beneath the surface.

But even then her horror seemed to be veined with a curious sensation of jealous pain, for she pictured to herself Helen floating down the stream with her white hands extended for help, and Hilton fighting his way through the water to her side. Then he seemed to seize her, and to make a brave struggle to keep her up. It was a hard fight, and he did not spare himself, but appeared to be ready to drown that she might live. The water looked blacker and darker where they were, and there was no help at hand, so that it was but a question of moments before they must sink. And as, with dilated, horror-charged eyes, Grey stared before her to where the river really ran sparkling in the sunshine, the imaginary blackness deepened, and all looked so smooth and terrible that she watched for where that dreadful glassiness would be broken by some reptile rising to make a rush at the struggling pair; and—yes, there at last it was! And with the name of Hilton half-formed upon her lips, she uttered another cry, and fell fainting in the Inche's Maida's arms.

Volume Two—Chapter Eight.

Danger Ahead.

Grey Stuart lost her cavalier Chumbley soon after supper, for the Princess pointed to a chair beside her, Hilton being very quiet and distant, and in spite of several reproachful glances from his companion's eyes, proving to be very poor company indeed.

In fact, as soon as he could with decency give up what was to him a tiresome duty, Hilton left the Malay Princess's side, making the vacancy that was filled up by Grey, while soon after the Rajah came and took a chair upon the other side of the Scottish maiden, chatting to her with a slight hesitancy of speech, but pleasantly and well.

"Do you enjoy—this party?" he said.

"Oh! so much!" replied Grey. "It is so different from anything at home."

"At home?" queried the Prince, who knew the simplicity of old Stuart's household.

"I mean at home in England."

"Oh! yes, I see. At home in England," said the Prince musingly. "I must go and see at home in England. I should like to go."

"You would be much pleased, I am sure," said Grey, smiling; "but it is a very bad climate."

"That is why you English come to our beautiful land. I see!" exclaimed the Prince. "But you enjoy yourself—this party?"

"Oh! very much!" cried Grey; but a shadow crossed her countenance as she spoke.

"I have said I will try and pass you all," said the Prince, laughing. "I mean mine to be the greatest of the *fêtes*. It must be; for if I do not make mine a grander party than all, my people will look down upon me, and say, 'See how weak and poor he is compared to the English!' I must make mine very brave and good."

"I hear what you are saying," exclaimed the Inche Maida; "but I will excel you; for I will give another party, greater, and brighter, and more beautiful still. Miss Stuart will help me with good advice, and mine shall be more English than yours. We will not be beaten."

"No, no!" said the Rajah, laughing; "do not help her, Miss Stuart; help me, and I will be so grateful. It is so easy to say I will give a grand party, but it is hard to make it so that it will please these English gentlemen and ladies."

"Ladies and gentlemen, Prince," said the Inche Maida.

"Of course—yes," he replied. "That is where I make things wrong. You English place the ladies first, and I always make mistakes like that."

"You will soon acquire our habits," said Grey, who could not help her eyes wandering in search of Hilton.

"Thank you," said the Prince. "I shall try; but as I say, it is so hard to make a feast quite right. If I want to make a banquet for my people with flowers, and fireworks, and elephants, and gongs, and tom-toms, it is all so easy; but an English party, to satisfy all you—ah! it is too much."

Meanwhile, heart-sick and disgusted with everything and everybody present, Hilton wandered away to the pagoda, where Mr Stuart had taken up his quarters directly after supper.

"Hullo! young fellow," said the old merchant, gruffly, "come to your senses again?"

"Senses? Haven't been out of them that I know of," retorted Hilton.

"Well, ye've been running wild after Perowne's lassie."

"Mr Stuart!"

"And one never sees her without Captain Hilton ahint her."

"Mr Stuart, I was not aware that I was answerable to you for my conduct," exclaimed the young officer, hotly.

"Nay—nay—nay—dinna—don't be fashed, laddie, I was vexed to see ye rinning after a lassie who will throw ye over for the next man she sees—that's a'—"

"Mr Stuart, I will not listen to anything in Miss Perowne's disparagement!" cried the young man hotly. "How dare you speak to me like this!"

"Have a cigar, laddie?" said the old Scot, drily. "They're verra good, and they'll soothe ye down better than anything I ken."

Hilton glared at him angrily. "There, there, there, let me have my say, laddie. I rather like ye, Hilton, though ye are only a soldier; so don't fly in a passion with an old man. Tak' a cigar."

Hilton hesitated, but finally took the cigar, lit it, and began to smoke.

"I ken weel what's wrong," said the old man; "but never heed it, mon. It mak's ye sore to-day, but ye'll soon get over it. I've seen ivery thing that's gone on sin the lassies have been here. Try a drappie o' that whuskie, laddie; that and yon cigar will mak' ye forget all about the trouble wi' the girl."

"Mr Stuart, I must request you to be silent upon this question, unless you wish to quarrel."

"Quarrel? Not I, lad! I'm as peaceable a body as ever lived; but tak' my advice—don't wherret yoursel' about Helen Perowne. She's not made for ye."

"Sir!"

"Hoot, laddie, in a passion again! I tell ye you're much too good for such a body as she. I ken she's handsome enough for an angel; but what's all that if she don't care a twistle o' the finger for ye?" Bertie Hilton frowned heavily and smoked furiously; while, when the old merchant thrust the whiskey decanter towards him, he snatched it up, poured out half a tumbler full, and had stretched out his hand to take it and gulp it down, when, to his surprise and anger, old Stuart snatched the tumbler away, poured half of the spirit back into the decanter, and then filled up the tumbler with water.

"Not while I'm sitting by ye, Bertie Hilton," said the old man. "I like my whuskie and I like to see a fren' enjoy his drappie wi' me; but it must be a drappie. When I see a man making a fool o' himsel' by taking more than is good, I just stop him if I can, as I stopped you."

The young man's face flushed, and an angry remark was about to issue from his lips, when the ridiculous and friendly sides of the question presented themselves to him, and instead of going into a fit of temper consequent upon his irritable state, he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Hah! That's better, my lad," said the old merchant, smiling in his dry, grim fashion. "I like that. Ye're an officer and ye know how to command yourself as well as your men. Now then, sit down and sup your whuskie and smoke like a man."

"You shall be obeyed, sir," said Hilton, good-humouredly.

"That's right, laddie. Tak' your misfortunes like a man. I know it's hard to bear, and nothing wherrets a man more than seeing a lassie play wi' others before his very een, when a' the time she has been leading him to believe she cares for him alone?"

"Would it be a very difficult task to you, Mr Stuart, to leave my private affairs alone?" said Hilton, quietly.

"Oh, ay, I'll leave them alone if ye'll only be sensible and act like a mon. Bertie Hilton, ye're a big mon, and a captain in Her Majesty's service, and ye're been acting like a weak boy."

Hilton's eyes flashed again as he turned angrily upon the old man, who seemed to become more Scottish in his language as he slowly imbibed his native drink.

"I see ya glowering at me, my lad; but I dinna mind it, for I'm one of your best frens, and when I thrash ye with words about your lassie it's a' for your good. There, haud yer whisht. I ken what ye'd say, that ye're a mon and not a boy to be dictated to by an old Scotchman like this."

"Well, I was thinking something of the kind, Mr Stuart, and so I tell you frankly," cried Hilton, who could not help feeling amused at the old man's dry ways. The reproofs, too, came at a time when the younger was very much open to conviction, for his experiences of the last few days had all been towards showing him that Helen Perowne was trifling with him, and if she were now, he felt that she had been from the first.

Still, it was very painful to have to be taken to task like this upon so tender a subject; and after sitting awhile with the old man, he suddenly jumped up, relit his cigar, which he had allowed to go out, and nodding shortly, he strolled out of the pagoda into the grounds.

"Coming to his senses," said old Stuart, in a thoughtful way. "Hah! I should go rather cross it my lassie were to carry on like Perowne's Helen. Why, she drives nearly all the young fellows wild. The young hussy! she ought to be shut up in a convent till she comes to her senses. I'd have none of it at home with me."

Volume Two—Chapter Nine.

A Supplement to a Strange Evening.

It was very beautiful in the gardens, and in spite of the number of people present, the place was so large that Hilton had no difficulty in finding a shady path in whose gloom he could walk up and down, finding the silence and darkness congenial in his present state of mind.

Every here and there there were lanterns, and flashes of light came from the illuminated lawn in company with the strains of music; but for the greater part the light was that from the great soft stars in the begemmed arch overhead, and the music that of the swift river rippling against the bank.

What should he do? he asked himself. Would he not be acting a wiser and a more manly part if he at once gave up his pursuit of Helen, and treated her with the contempt she deserved?

For she did deserve contempt. He felt this, and he knew the state of the warm affection he had had for her. He knew she had flirted a little before, but he looked upon that as mere maiden trifling before she had been ready to bestow upon him all the riches of her fresh young love. He was ready to condone anything that had taken place before; but when, after some long experience, he found that he was only being made the plaything of the hour, and that she was ready to throw him over in favour of the newest comer, his heart rebelled.

The fact was that Hilton was coming back to his normal senses very fast, and the idol that he had been worshipping and accrediting with all the perfections under the sun, was beginning to assume a very matter-of-fact, worldly aspect in his eyes.

The chaplain, officer after officer on board ship, Chumbley, Mr Harley, himself—they had all been favoured lovers in turn, and then thrown over after a certain amount of trifling.

"I cannot think how I could have been so foolish!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "and yet she is very beautiful—most beautiful; and when she gives a fellow one of those tender, beseeching looks, he need be made of iron to resist her."

He walked up and down a little longer, finished his cigar, lit another, and went on, evidently feeling in better spirits.

"I shall get over it in a few days," he said, with a half laugh, "unless I turn disappointed swain, and go and jump into the river. The crocodiles would soon make short work of me. By jove! how beautiful those fire-flies are!" he exclaimed.

Then he sighed, and went backward mentally.

"They put one in mind of Helen's beautiful eyes," he muttered. Beautiful Helen! Bah! Stuff! I'll be fooled by no woman living!

"Shall I, wasting in despair.
Die because a woman's fair?
Shall I pale
my cheeks with care
Because another's rosy are?"

He sang softly, enjoying more and more the delicious coolness of the breeze off the river.

"I'm nearly cured," he said, bitterly.

"I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware! beware!
Trust her not,
She is fooling thee!"

He sang again in a low voice.

"My case exactly. Oh! my dear madam. I'm afraid you will come to grief one of these days, for it is not every fellow who will give you up as I do, and hide his wound under a smiling face.

"And do I give her up?" he said, softly; and there was a tender, dreamy look in his eyes as he spoke.

"Bah! what a madman I am!" he cried, with a mocking laugh; "she throws me over as she has thrown over others. What an idiot I was not to see all this sooner!

"The old story—the old story," he muttered. "Man's vanity and woman's pride. I was conceited enough to think that, though she might trifle with others, I was her one special choice. There was no such other man upon the earth as I, Captain Hilton, the Apollo among his fellows. Serve me right!" he cried passionately, "for a weak fool, and I deserve it all, if only to be a lesson to bring me to my senses?"

Growing excited with his thoughts, he strolled down another path, leading to the lower lawn which sloped to the river.

"I wonder who is with her now!" he muttered, as he gazed with lowering brow at the smooth, star-spangled stream.

"What does it matter! I'll get a lesson in *nonchalance* from old Chum! I've been fooled like the rest. I might have known that I should be, but I was conceited enough to think that I had thoroughly won her heart."

He told himself that it was all over now, and smoked away viciously, sending forth great puffs of vapour, still thinking of his position.

"What the dickens did that woman, the Inche Maida, mean!" he said, suddenly, as he strolled now close beside the river in complete forgetfulness of all the dangers with which it was invested by his friends. "Why, if I were a conceited fellow—well, so I am, horribly," he said, bitterly—"I should have fancied that she was making love to me. It is too ridiculous!" he exclaimed, stopping short, and seeing nothing but introspectively, hearing nothing but the echoes of his own thoughts. "This place is growing hateful to me. I shall get leave or exchange. I feel as if I could not stay here any longer, and—Hah! Help! What! Good Heav—"

The rest of Hilton's words did not reach the soft midnight air, for, deep in thought, he had not seen the shadow even of the coming danger which had fallen in an instant, and his mad struggles were proving all in vain.

Volume Two—Chapter Ten.

Plus.

As Hilton cried for help his voice sounded stifled and dull, while he vainly tried to cast off a great woollen cloth that had been deftly thrown over his head. It took hardly an instant before it was wound tightly round him. Then a rope was twisted so rapidly round arms and legs, that he was turned, as it were, into a complete mummy; and when his assailants threw him upon the grass he was so helpless that they literally rolled him over and over down the slope of closely shaven herbage into a large row-boat, into whose bottom he fell without pain, and almost without a sound.

"I thought it was the crocodiles," he said to himself, as his heart beat painfully; and then he began to writhe in spirit at his want of caution, for he felt sure that this, the capture of an officer, was one of the first steps towards an attack upon the Residency island.

Just then he heard a voice, and what seemed to be a whispered order in Malay; and the boat might have been seen to glide away like a shadow over the starry water, breaking it up into spangles as it went on and on towards the middle of the stream without so much as a sound.

Then a pang shot through the young officer's heart, to tell him that he was not, in spite of his word, quite cured, for

his first thought now was: "What will become of Helen!" A few minutes later Chumbley strolled up to the pagoda, where old Stuart was comfortably enjoying his glass.

"Well, old fellow," he drawled: "not melted away yet."

"No; nor you neither," retorted the old merchant. "Want some whuskie?"

"No; I want a cigar," said Chumbley; and he helped himself from the box. "Seen anything of Hilton?" he asked, as he lit the roll of tobacco.

"Yes! here a bit ago, and then went off to smoke in the cool air. Leave my little girl all right?"

"Yes; she was sitting talking to the Princess and the Rajah in front of the house. What a lovely night!"

"Humph, yes. Pretty well; but you should see the night, laddie, over one o' the Scottish lochs, wi' the ootline o' a mountain stannin oot i' front o' the northern sky. Ay, but that's a sight."

"Yes, s'pose so," said Chumbley; "but as we can't have the night over the Scottish loch, isn't it as well to make the best of this?"

"Humph! yes," said the old man; "but I'm getting tired of sitting here. I want to go back home. How much longer is this tomfoolery going to last?"

"Can't say, sir. Why don't you go on to the lawn and have a chat?"

"Pah! Do I look like a man who could do that sort of thing?"

"Can't say you do," replied Chumbley, cheerfully. "Well, I'm going to look for Hilton!" and, stepping out of the pagoda, he went across the lawn, with his hands deep down in his pockets.

"*Now*, let's see," he said to himself, as he strolled lazily on, "where would that chap be likely to have stuck himself up for a quiet smoke?"

"Seems to have had a tiff with beauty to-night. P'r'aps she has pitched him as she has other people before, present company not excepted. All the more likely for him to have gone off for a quiet smoke—Now where would he go?"

There was a pause here, as if for someone else to answer, but as no one did—

"Down by the river," he said—"safe." Chumbley thrust his hands lower down into his pockets, and as if led by fate, he followed slowly almost the very track taken by Hilton so short a time before.

Finding that portion of the extensive grounds quite solitary, Chumbley began to hum what was meant for an air, in a peculiar voice more remarkable for noise than tune—due, no doubt, to his having his cigar in his lips, at which he gravely sucked away as if keeping time to the melody he emitted with the smoke.

"Grass too damp to lie down," he said to himself, "else it would be rather jolly, and I'm precious tired. Not safe though. Old Bolter would vow there was rheumatism and fever in every blade. Why the dickens don't they put garden seats down here?"

He strolled on, casting his eyes about in every direction in search of his friend.

"Precious dark!" he said. "Now where has old Hilton hidden himself? Hallo! Why there he is! What a jolly old lunatic he must be. I wonder what old Bolter would say?"

For not very far from the bank of the stream, he could dimly make out a figure lying apparently asleep.

Chumbley immediately began to think of the risks to be incurred from crocodiles, and walking quickly up he bent down over the sleeping figure.

"Here—hi! Hallo! Hilton, is that you? Hang it, man, don't lie there!"

There was no reply, and Chumbley hesitated as to whether he should touch the figure.

"'Tisn't Hilton!" he said to himself. "One of the servants, perhaps, keeping up his Mohammedan rules on the question of wine upon the wrong side."

"Hallo! you sir!" he cried aloud. "'Tisn't safe to lie there; do you hear?" and going down on one knee, he turned the figure completely over. "Here wake up or the crocs will have you! Is anything the matter?"

"Help me up," came in reply, spoken in good English.

Chumbley was too earnest a man to resist that appeal; and bending lower, he tried to pass one hand beneath the prostrate figure, the man feebly laying his hands upon the lieutenant the while.

Then, in an instant, the feeble clasp became one of iron; and before Chumbley could more than realise that he was being held, a second figure bounded from behind a bush on to his back, dexterously throwing a sort of bag over his head and drawing it tight about his neck.

The young officer was taken by surprise; but he was not so easy a prey as Hilton. As a rule, Chumbley resembled the

elephant in his slow, ponderous movement. Now, there was something almost leonine in his activity, the latent almost herculean strength he possessed being brought into play.

Uttering a smothered roar, he tried to shake off his assailants as they clung to his back and neck, pinioning his arms, and holding on so closely, that in the dark the figures of the three men seemed like one huge monstrous creature writhing savagely upon the grass.

Four more dark figures had suddenly appeared upon the scene, looking weird and strange in the starlight; and while the distant sound of voices, with an occasional burst of laughter, came to where the struggle was going on, all here was so quiet—save for the oppressed breathing—that no attention was drawn towards them from the visitor-dotted lawn.

The fresh-comers leaped at Chumbley like dogs at their hunted quarry; but so fierce was the resistance that one of them was dashed to the earth, the others shaken off, and the young man followed up the display of his tremendous strength by making a blindfold effort to ran.

The probabilities are that, as he had instinctively taken the direction leading to the house, he would have got so far that his assailants would not have cared to follow, had not one of them thrust out a foot as Chumbley was passing, and tripped him up, when he fell with a heavy thud to the ground.

Before he could make a fresh effort to rise, half a dozen Malays were upon him; and while some sat and knelt upon, others bound him hand and foot.

Then they paused to listen whether the struggle had been overheard; but finding it had excited no attention either at the house or the Residency island, they leisurely rolled their prisoner over and over down the grassy slope into a waiting boat close up to the bank. A few vessels of water were dipped, and quickly poured over the grass where the struggle had taken place, and then once more the star-spangled surface of the river was broken up as a shadowy boat softly glided out to the middle of the river, and then seemed to die away.

But the incidents of the night were not yet at an end, Fate seemed to lend her aid to bring them to one peculiar bent.

For, hot and weary of the insipid attentions of her new conquest, and fagged out with her task of entertaining so many guests, Helen Perowne began to think of how she should escape, wishing the while that everyone would go, and far from satisfied with her last encounter with Hilton.

She looked round the lit-up space for someone on whom to inflict herself, but Hilton was not there; she could see neither Chumbley nor the Resident, only several of the younger men, merchants and civil officers—no one at all worth talking to save the chaplain, who had been watching her wistfully all the evening, and who now stood with one hand resting upon a chair, looking as if he would have given his life for one kind word from her lips.

“Poor Arthur!” she said, in a half amused, half troubled way, “I wish he would not be so weak?”

She gave another impatient look round, but there was no victim worthy of her arrows; and with an imperious glance at Arthur Rosebury, she let her eyes once more pass over the various groups of guests, for the most part carrying on an animated conversation, and turned to enter the house.

Just as she reached one of the open French windows, a Malay servant approached, and saluted her respectfully.

“The master says will the mistress come down the garden a minute to speak to him?”

“How tiresome!” she exclaimed petulantly. “Where is my father?”

“By the river, mistress, where it is cool to smoke,” replied the man, softly. “He says he will not keep you, but you must come at once.”

This was all in broken English, but sufficiently plain to be understood.

“He might have come to me,” said Helen, impatiently. “I am so hot and tired. There, go on. No, not that way. Let us go by the side path.”

The man bowed and went on, with Helen following, when the chaplain seized the opportunity to join her.

“It is getting cold and damp, Miss Perowne,” he said, softly. “Will you let me put this over your shoulders?”

“What!” she said; “have you been carrying that ever since I gave it to you hours ago?”

The chaplain bowed, and held the light, filmy shawl, that he had felt it a joy to bear, ready to throw over her shoulders.

“No,” she cried, petulantly, “I am too hot as it is. There,” she cried, relenting, as she saw his fallen countenance, and for want of another victim, “you may come with me and carry the shawl till I want to put it on.”

The chaplain’s heart gave a bound, and, too pleased to speak, he followed Helen closely, as the man led her towards the bottom of the lawn, where, as they drew nearer, a dark figure could be dimly seen slowly pacing up and down.

“How angry dear Mary would be if she knew,” thought the Reverend Arthur; “but I cannot help it. I suppose I am very weak, and it is my fate?”

“What is wrong now?” thought Helen, whose conscience was quick to take alarm. “Is he going to speak to me about

Hilton? No; he would not have—he could not have been so cowardly as to speak to my father about our quarrel.”

They were very near now, and Helen could see that her father had one hand up to his face, resting the elbow in his other hand.

“It cannot be about Murad. That must be over,” mused Helen. Then aloud, “Is anything the matter, papa? Are you unwell?”

At that moment she realised the fact that the figure in evening dress was not her father, the chaplain noticing her start, and trying to go forward to her aid; but, as he took a step, a hand was clapped over his lips, an arm tightly embraced him, and as he dimly saw a white handkerchief tied across Helen’s face, he was lifted from the ground and borne away, too much surprised to do more than struggle weakly at such a disadvantage that even a strong man would have been as helpless as a child.

Helen made an effort to shriek for aid, but a black cloud seemed suddenly to envelop her in the shape of a great cloth, wrapping her round and round. Then she felt herself lifted from her feet, and half-stifled, half-fainting with the horror of her situation, she was just conscious of being carried for a few minutes, and then of being placed in a boat; while in the midst of her horror and excitement there seemed to come up before her the faces of her three old mistresses at the calm, quiet school, then that of Grey Stuart looking reproachfully, and then all faded away into one complete void.

Volume Two—Chapter Eleven.

A Floating Captivity.

What seemed to be an endless ride by water, during which the captives felt over and over again as if they would be suffocated by the folds of the cloths in which they were enveloped.

Several times had the two first prisoners made such desperate efforts to free themselves that the boats in which they were rocked dangerously, that in which Chumbley had been thrown shipping a little water more than once; but finding by degrees that it was only a waste of strength, and contenting themselves with the idea that though an Englishman may never know when he is beaten, they had done everything possible to vindicate their character, they lay quite still, dripping with perspiration and gasping for air.

An hour must have gone by when, in each boat, as the prisoner lay perfectly quiescent, it seemed to strike the captors almost simultaneously that if something were not done suffocation might ensue. Under these circumstances efforts were made to give them a little of that bounteous provision of air that was waiting to revive their exhausted frames.

Chumbley was lying upon his face in the bottom of the boat, the exhaustion having produced a semi-delirious sensation, in which he fancied that he was in evening dress, of a very thick texture, dancing in a crowded ballroom, and so giddy that he was in a constant state of alarm lest he should hurl his partner, the Malay princess, headlong upon the floor.

This sensation kept coming and going with saner thoughts of having done his best, and its being useless to struggle, in the midst of one of which intervals he awoke to the fact that his hands were being held tightly behind him, and back to back. Then someone, with a deftness of habit that told of long custom, tied his thumbs together, and then his little fingers.

Next he felt a stout cord passed round his ankles and another about his legs just above the knees, after which the thick cloth was drawn from his head, and he gasped and panted as he filled his lungs again and again with the pure night air, which cleared his brain and sent the crowded ballroom, the thick costume, and the giddiness of the waltz far back into the unreal region from which they came.

For a moment he revelled in the sight of the brilliant star-lit heavens, and then, almost before he knew it, a cloth was bound tightly round his eyes.

“A seizure by banditti,” muttered Chumbley, “quite in the romantic style, and I shall be held to ransom, when, seeing that I have nothing but my pay—and that is hardly enough for my expenses—I may say, in the words of the monkey who held out his tail to the chained-up dog, ‘Don’t you wish you may get it!’ Oh, I say, though, I’m as sore as if I’d been thrashed. Whatever game is this?”

“If you will promise to be silent,” said a deep voice at his ear in the Malayan tongue, “we will not thrust a cloth into your mouth.”

“I wish they’d pour a glass of Bass into it instead,” thought Chumbley. “I say, you sir,” he replied, in as good Malayan as he could command, “what does this mean?”

“Wait and see.”

“Are you going to kris me?”

“No.”

“Well, that’s a comfort,” muttered Chumbley. “I might have known it by their taking so much trouble, though five minutes ago it would have been a charity to put me out of my misery.”

"Will you be silent if I leave your mouth free?" was asked again.

"I don't see that it's of much use to halloo," said Chumbley, sullenly, "but look here, old chap, what does this mean? Tell me, and I'll be as quiet as a lamb."

"Wait and see," was the reply.

Chumbley was silent for a few minutes, drawing in long breaths of air. Then, addressing his captors, who seemed to him to be steadily rowing on:

"I say," he exclaimed, "can I have this rag off my eyes?"

"No."

Another pause, during which the prisoner listened to the pleasant ripple of the water against the boat.

"I say," from Chumbley.

"Yes."

"I can't fight now or else I would."

There was a low laugh, which seemed to come from a dozen throats, and the same deep voice replied:

"My lord is a giant in strength, but we have him fast."

"Then set me up, so that I can sit comfortably, or I shan't be worth a Chinese dragon dollar if you want me for sale."

There was another low laugh, as if the Malay captors were amused; and then, in obedience to a whispered order, the prisoner was lifted and placed in a more comfortable position, but not without some effort and grunting on the part of the men who essayed to move him, the boat rocking about ominously the while.

"That's better," said the prisoner. "Hah, I can get on now! Here I say, old chap, whoever you are, put your hand in my breast."

"Does my lord wish me to promise that we will not slay him?" said the deep-voiced Malay.

"Bosh! No!" cried Chumbley. "In my breast-pocket. That's right. Now take out the cigar-case. Not the pocket-book. The cigar-case. That's it! Now open it and take out a cigar. Put it in my mouth. Have one?"

"My lord's servant does not smoke when he has work to do," replied the Malay.

"All right, then, I have none," said Chumbley, coolly. "Put the end in my mouth, and give me a light. There's a match-box in my vest."

There was a low laugh once more in the fore-part of the boat; but the prisoner was too intent upon feeling the hand thrust into his breast, his cigar-case opened and snapped again, the case returned, the roll of tobacco placed in his lips, and then the light struck and held convenient for him to draw.

"Hah!" he said to himself, "it's wonderful what comfort there is in a cigar at a time like this! How I do pity the poor little women who are not allowed to smoke!"

He said a few words to the Malays, but they were very quiet and reticent; and feeling that it was of no further use to talk to them in their own tongue, which was a trouble to him, he began to think in English, which, if not of much comfort, was at all events an occupation for the time being.

"This is a rum set-out," he thought, as he settled himself as comfortably as he could, and smoked away. "An hour or so ago I was at an English evening-party, held for coolness upon a lawn. Now I am here in a boat; but where the dickens here is I don't know.

"But what does it mean? I'm not of the slightest use to anybody; and they are not doing it for revenge, because I haven't made any enemies. Let me see, though—have I?"

He paused thoughtfully for a few minutes. "No—no, I can't think of anybody except Miss Helen, for rejecting her tender glances. Let's see, what did Byron or some other chap say about there being no what-you-may-call-it so dangerous as a woman scorned? Can't recollect quotations—never could. But that's all nonsense. Helen Perowne wouldn't want to have me carried off like this.

"That's it," he said, half aloud this time, and after a thoughtful pause. "It's ransom, that's what it is. The noodles think because I am an English officer, and flash about in scarlet and gold, that I must be very rich. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Chumbley indulged himself with a long and rumbling chuckle.

"They'll be precious disappointed on finding out I've none, and if they expect to get it out of the British Government they'll find that the payment will be made in rifle balls, unless some very urgent appeals are made in Parliament respecting the risk, when the question will arise, what will the noble, the British Government, as represented by its Secretary for the time being, think that my great carcass is worth."

Chumbley had sat there for a considerable time smoking and listening, for he had suddenly awakened to the fact that there was another boat hard by, with whose occupants his captors conversed in a low voice.

Then suddenly he heard a familiar voice speaking fiercely in the Malayan tongue.

Chumbley hesitated for a moment to make sure, and then shouted:

"Why, Hilton, old man, are you there?"

"Chumbley! Here! Help!" cried Hilton. "Help, man, help!"

"Bring it here, then," said Chumbley, coolly.

"I cannot. I'm a prisoner: seized by Malay scoundrels."

"Same here, old man," said Chumbley, puffing away at his cigar, the incandescent part of which was getting dangerously near his nose. "Pleasant finish to the Perowne *fête*, isn't it?"

Here there was a fierce adjuration from the Malays in the other boat, which Hilton obeyed to the extent of speaking in a lower tone.

"What is to be done?" he said, "I'd come and help you, but I'm bound hand and foot."

"So am I, old man," replied Chumbley, coolly. "Tighter than you are, I'll swear."

"But what is to be done?" said Hilton again.

"Goodness knows. Nothing, I should say. Have a cigar?"

"Chumbley!" cried Hilton, passionately, "is this a time for joking, when at any moment our lives may be taken! Be sensible if you can."

"I thought that was being sensible or philosophical if you like it better, old man. I don't see that it's of any use to fret so long as they don't kill us. It will be a change from pipe-clay and parade; and judging from what I saw between you and someone else in a certain quarter to-day, I should have thought that you would have been glad of a holiday."

"Holiday, with a kris at our throats," cried Hilton, passionately.

"Bah! they won't kill us!" said Chumbley.

"I tell you that is what the scoundrels mean!" replied Hilton. "Not that it matters much," he added gloomily.

"Oh, doesn't it!" said Chumbley, "but it does, a good deal. I don't know that we should make much fuss—soldiers can't; but I know of plenty of people who would cry their eyes out about me."

"If the English rajahs," said a voice, that seemed to the two young men in their bandaged condition to come out of the darkness, and to speak haltingly, as if the utterer were not quite sure of the language in which he spoke—"If the English rajahs will be patient, and not try to escape, no harm shall be done to them."

"There," said Chumbley, "do you hear that, old man! Better have a cigar."

"Rubbish!" cried Hilton, angrily.

"Not a bit of it, old man," said Chumbley; "they are some of old Perowne's best, and I have just finished one, and am going to have another. Here! hi! my lord the Malay chief, Maharajah, Muntri, Tumongong, or whatever you are, stop the boat, and give my friend a cigar. Load us both and fire us old chap, and then we can go off comfortably."

There was no cessation in the rowing; but as Chumbley sat back there he felt his request attended to, the smoked-out cigar being taken from his lips and thrown into the water, where it fell with a loud hiss, the case taken from his breast, opened, and then it seemed that the boats were drawn together, and a cigar was passed to Hilton.

"Got it, old man?" said Chumbley, sucking at his own, and biting off the end.

"Yes," said Hilton gruffly, as if he were resenting the attentions of his captors.

Then came the sharp sound of a striking match; and though Chumbley tried hard, he found that his eyes were too well bandaged for him to catch even a gleam of the light, so he contented himself with drawing at his cigar, after which there was the loud hiss of the match thrown into the water, and the boats were once more urged onward at a goodly speed.

A little conversation was kept up; but over their cigars the two prisoners seemed to grow thoughtful, and at last there was a pause, which Chumbley broke at last with the question:

"I say, old chap, don't you think this means ransom?"

There was no reply, and the deep-voiced Malay said, in his own tongue:

"The other boat is far behind."

It must have been towards morning that a few words were uttered in Chumbley's boat; there seemed to him, as he immediately became on the *qui vive*, to be a quickening of the rower's strokes, the rustling of bushes, some twigs of one of which brushed his arm, and then they ascended, as far as he could judge, a narrow stream for a short distance, for the oars kept striking bushes or reeds on either side; and now the boat that held Hilton had evidently come up close behind.

"They mean to hide us away well, at all events," thought Chumbley. "Now I wonder whether we have come up the stream or down."

He had hardly given life to that query, when a gentle check, as if the bows of the boat had run into mud, told that the shore was reached.

A few rapid orders succeeded, and it seemed to Chumbley that now they were about to land he would have his cramped legs unbound; but no. The next minute he was seized by four men, lifted out, and laid upon the soft, mossy ground.

"You there, Hilton?" he said, as he lay upon his side as helpless as a newly-landed fish.

"Yes, I am here," was the reply.

"The English rajahs can talk as they like," said the deep-voiced Malay. "No one can hear them now."

"Humph! Thanks for the great concession," growled Chumbley; and he was about to take advantage of the permission, when he felt himself again lifted, and laid this time in a kind of hammock that seemed to be slung upon poles, and then for a couple of hours at least, he and Hilton, who was in a similar conveyance behind, were borne along some narrow pathway of the jungle, the leaves, and strands, and thin verdant canes brushing against them constantly, and sweeping their faces at times when they were halted for the bearers to be changed.

"Well," said Chumbley, chuckling softly, "I hope they are enjoying themselves with their job over me. They'll declare that they have had the honour of carrying a very great man."

A final halt at last, when fresh voices were heard. The hammocks were set down upon what seemed to be a framework; then they were lifted, tilted very much at one end, as if a flight of steps were being ascended, and at last the prisoners felt themselves to be landed upon what felt like a bamboo floor.

Next they were lifted out, carried a few steps, and laid upon soft matting; there was the *pad, pad—pad, pad* of shoeless feet over the floor, and all was perfectly still.

Volume Two—Chapter Twelve.

A Bird in a Cage.

Helen Perowne's horror upon finding herself borne helplessly away was so great that she swooned, remaining insensible for some very considerable time, and when she did recover herself it was only to faint again and again, becoming afterwards so thoroughly prostrate that she took no note of either time or the direction in which she was being taken.

Hours must have elapsed before, in the total darkness caused by the stifling veil thrown over her head, she found that she was being carried in some kind of litter along a forest path, whose leaves and vines brushed her as she passed.

This seemed to last a long time, and to be very unreal and dreamy. In fact, more than once she felt that she must be in some terribly troubled dream, out of which she kept awaking to the reality of her position and calling for help.

It was in vain she knew, for her voice seemed to return upon her; and at last, wearied out and exhausted, she lay there passive, thinking of the past, and wondering what her future was to be.

She was too much prostrated to be able to think with clearness; but her thoughts kept turning to her career since she left England, and the dark, threatening face of Murad was constantly before her eyes. That he was connected with this outrage she felt no doubt, and as she thought of her weak vanity and the strait to which it had brought her, the tears filled her eyes and trickled slowly down her cheeks.

Then other faces rose before her in the darkness, as if upbraiding her for what she had done. She saw the Rev. Arthur Rosebury, calm, patient, and uncomplaining, satisfied if she only gave him a look or word; Chumbley, her very slave at first, but then a rebel, ready to look at her mockingly, as if laughing at his broken chain; Hilton, devoted and tender but exacting, as if he doubted her truth; Murad, again fierce and lurid in his love, so that she shuddered as she saw his dark eyes and white teeth; a dozen others with whom she had trifled; and lastly, the quiet, firm face of Neil Harley, half laughing, half angry with her, but full of determination, as if he were constantly telling her that he was but waiting till she had grown wiser, for she would yet be his.

As these faces seemed to rise before her out of the thick darkness, it was as though she were haunted, and it was in a wild, passionate way that she seemed in her dreamy state to be defying them, bidding them go—all but one, whose power was too great even for her angry words to repel. No; Neil Harley merely mocked and laughed, and seemed to say: "I can wait; I shall appeal no more, for some day I know, as I have often said, I shall have you humbled, a suppliant at my feet, begging me to take you, to protect you, to make you mine. Till then I can wait!"

It was all darkness again, and these words but a fancy of her brain; but how real it all seemed—so real that Helen shuddered as she wept.

“I hate him—I detest him!” she panted. “I would sooner die than humble myself as he has said—sooner become the wife of this Indian prince, of Hilton, or of anyone who pleaded for my love. Supplicate! And to him! What madness! Why do I think such things? Is my brain reeling? Are my senses leaving me? Heaven help me? What shall I do?”

The heat was intense, and the prisoner could hardly breathe, so closely was she veiled; and once more she sank into a dreamy swoon, in which the realities of her condition were so commingled with fancy that she could not separate them, and her efforts to master her reason were growing vain, when she was roused by what she doubted to be real at first, but which proved to be the gruff voices of men speaking by her litter-side.

Soon after she, too, found that she was being carried up a ladder, and rousing herself, she made a feeble effort to get free; but so weak was her straggle, that she was lifted by one man, carried up the steps, and laid upon a couch.

There was a few moments' pause then, and she heard her late companions depart. Then she felt busy hands about her, their touch making her shriek with horror; but as the stifling veil was removed she found it was nearly daylight, and her relief was great as she saw that she was surrounded by women.

She was too much exhausted to speak; but she found strength enough to join her hands together in a mute appeal for help; and one of the women bent over her, and proceeded to smooth back her dark and tangled hair.

“Give me water!” she panted, hoarsely. “Water!” but her words were not understood, and it was not until she had made signs, pointing to her mouth, that those in attendance brought her a cup of the refreshing fluid.

Whether it was drugged or not she never knew, but directly after she sank into a sleep that was deep enough to resemble a stupor, though most probably this was the effect of her utter weakness and prostration, her mental agony and excitement having been extreme. From this sleep she did not awaken for many hours, when, upon unclosing her eyes, she found that a couple of young Malay girls were watching her, evidently waiting for her to awaken, for no sooner had Helen unclosed her eyes than they proceeded to attend to her toilet, bringing water, brushes, and other necessaries, bathing her face, and then laughingly dressing her hair, chattering away to each other the while.

Helen plied them well with questions, but they only shook their heads; and feeling that it would be of no avail to resist, she submitted quietly to their attentions, letting them arrange her hair, which they did according to their own national tastes, and afterwards began to solicit her to partake of food.

As this last was placed before her Helen shook her head again and again; but the girls became so urgent with their pressure that she at last essayed to partake of the breakfast; but after a few mouthfuls, each of which seemed as if it would choke her, she broke down and crouched there, humbled and worn out with anxiety, sobbing aloud as if her very heart would break.

She felt that in a few short hours all had been changed. The last night she was Helen Perowne, whose lightest word seemed at the station to be obeyed as if it were law, and at whose look a score of people were ready to exert themselves to obey her wishes would she but indicate them to those who acted as if they were her slaves. To-day she was filled with a shrinking horror, for the terrible suspicion was ever gaining ground, and she shuddered in her misery as she thought of what her fate might be.

The hours went slowly on, but her thoughts were rapid. Her suspicions gathered strength, but her mental and bodily forces appeared to be slumbering, and it was only by a strong effort of will that she was able to keep up some semblance of pride, for she felt that her first display of weakness had lowered her terribly in her attendants' eyes.

By degrees she grew more composed, and in these calmer moments she began thinking of Grey Stuart, and wished for the protection of her company, as she thought more and more of the calm, self-assured manner of her school companion, and wondered what she was doing now.

Helen could see that she was in a handsomely-decorated room, whose bamboo-barred window looked out upon waving palms and flowering trees. The door was hung with a rich silk curtain, and on two sides were low couches or divans, spread with Indian rugs, several of which were lying on the smooth bamboo floor.

There was little of ornament in the room, but the hangings and rugs looked rich, and Helen's suspicion grew rapidly stronger as her eyes wandered here and there, and she thought of whose all these things must be.

Suddenly a slight rustle of the silken hangings caught her ear, and turning her eyes in the direction, she drew a breath of relief as she saw that it was caused by a little knot of Malay women, who were eagerly scanning her with their great dark eyes, and evidently regarding her as a curiosity.

These departed and others came—dark-faced, scowling women, in their gay sarongs—whispering to each other, and passing comments on the stranger; while Helen sat there, trying hard to keep up her stately air and to let these insolent gazers know that though a prisoner she was an English lady, and their superior still.

Twice over a couple of these visitors addressed some remark to the girls who seemed to have been placed there as attendants. What these remarks were Helen could not tell, but they drew forth angry expostulations from the girls, who at once went and drew the great curtain, and seemed to forbid further intrusion.

This was evidently the case, for saving that her two attendants remained in the room, Helen was undisturbed; and feeling somewhat recovered, she made an effort to win her companions to her side, beginning by questioning them in as friendly a manner as she could assume, but without effect; for though it was evident that one of them

understood English words mingled with such Malay as the prisoner could recollect, the girl made no reply, only looked at her with indifferent eyes, and kept on shaking her head to every question as to why the speaker had been seized and was forcibly detained.

Volume Two—Chapter Thirteen.

Helen's Tirewomen.

Helen Perowne's great horror in her situation of captive was the coming night. The day had been more bearable, as in the comparative coolness of the shaded room with its open windows she had felt the influence of the quietude and calm of the forest at which she gazed. Her mind was tortured by surmises and wonder as to whether her friends would not soon arrive to rescue her, while at every sound she started in fear of seeing her suspicion fully verified; but still she had bravely grown more composed and rested. She was among women, watched by women, and sooner or later she felt sure that someone from the station would arrive in pursuit.

For it was monstrous to suppose that such a crime as the seizure of an English lady would be allowed to pass without swift retribution.

This idea comforted her, and in her more hopeful moments she wondered who would first come to her aid—whether it would be Mr Harley, Hilton, or her father. One of them, well backed by the soldiers, she told herself, would certainly be there ere long; but darkness began to fall. Nobody had been to her help, and shivering with dread, she watched the darkening of the shadows amongst the broad palm leaves, and alternated this with shuddering glances at the door, whose curtain now began to look black and funereal, and added to her dread.

Just at dark a couple of women entered, bearing various dishes for her evening meal; but the sight of food was repugnant to her, and the wine she dared not taste.

Her two attendants were, however, less scrupulous, and they ate and drank heartily, even to finishing the luscious fruit, of which there was a large dish, and whose juice would have been most welcome to Helen's parched and fevered lips.

At last, though, the remains of the meal were taken away; and after chatting together for some time by the open window, through which the moon shone, and from where Helen sat, turning the two girls into weird-looking silhouettes, they yawned, spoke sleepily, and ended by pointing to the couch the prisoner was to occupy, throwing themselves upon another, and apparently soon falling into a heavy sleep.

Helen lay resting upon her elbow, watching the darkened portion of the great room where her companions lay, and then letting her eyes rest upon the dimly-seen draped door, whose curtain seemed more than once to move, as if being drawn aside.

Watching this till her eyes felt strained, and seeing nothing more, she turned her gaze to the barred window, through which the last rays of the moon were streaming previous to its disappearing behind the dense belt of forest trees. Lower it sank and lower, till the room was in total darkness; and at last, moved by the desire to try and escape from her captivity, Helen rose with her heart throbbing violently, to try in a fearsome hopeless way whether she could not get out of the room, having afterwards some ill-defined idea in her mind that she might, if once clear of the prison where she then was, find her way to some native campong, whose inhabitants would give her shelter, and perhaps take her down the river in their boat to where more certain help might be secured.

It took some time to make up her mind to move, but when she had shaken off her dread and risen softly to her feet, hardly had she gone a yard, when one of the bamboos forming the floor gave a loud creak, and almost before she could realise the fact, the two girls had sprung up, seized her arms, and tenderly but firmly forced her back to her couch.

Helen lay there panting with indignation at the treatment she was receiving, but trying to contain herself, for she felt that any attempt at force would only be to her own injury, and that if she were to escape it must be by some subtle turn. So she lay there perfectly still for quite an hour before making any further attempt to reach the door, this time with as light a step as she could assume.

But though the moment before her companions seemed to be sleeping heavily, her slightest movement made them start up; and after several attempts to escape their watchfulness, one of them took her hand, grasped it firmly, and lay down to sleep by her side.

How that long, stifling night passed Helen Perowne could never afterwards tell; but towards morning she fell into a broken, troubled sleep, from which she awoke to find that the sun was very high, and that the two Malay girls were waiting to act as her tirewomen once again.

She still felt too weak to offer resistance to their acts, and she sat up and allowed them to bathe her face with a delicately-tinted, sweet-scented water, which, with a good deal of merry laughter, they liberally applied. It was cool and refreshing to her fevered cheeks and hands; and seeing that she liked it they kept up the bathing for some little time, chattering to her the while in their own language, which they supplemented now and then with a few words of English.

When this was over at last, and she had dried herself with the perfumed towels they brought, Helen started on finding that a portion of her own clothing had been removed, and that the Malay girls had substituted a couple of gay silken sarongs and a filmy scarf.

She appealed to them to return her own dress, but they only laughed and began to praise the gay colour of the sarongs, playfully throwing them round her to show how well they looked, and then clapping their hands and uttering cries indicative of their admiration of the effect.

Still Helen refused to accept the change, and after trying angry remonstrance, one of the girls ran out, to return directly with a couple of stern-looking, richly-dressed Malay women, who frowningly threatened the miserable girl with the indignity of force.

Still she refused; and clapping her hands, the elder of the two women opened the door for the admission of half a dozen slaves, when, feeling that resistance was vain, Helen signed that she would submit, and with drooping head and throbbing brow allowed her two attendants to drape her as they wished.

This over, breakfast was placed before her, and exhausted nature forced her to partake of the food with a better appetite.

"I shall need my strength," she said to herself; and she ate and drank, but started at every movement outside the room as she waited the coming of those who would set her free.

"Hilton, in spite of what has passed, will not rest until he has found me—poor fellow!"

She said these last two words with a mingling of contempt and pity in her voice; though had he presented himself then, she would have thrown herself gladly in his arms.

But there was no token of approaching relief. The voices of many women could be heard coming and going about what was apparently a large native house; and the prisoner could not avoid a shudder as from time to time she thought of who must be the owner of the place.

The morning was giving way to the heats of noon, and languid and heart-sick Helen was lying back upon one of the couches, thinking of the happy days of the past, and trying to piece together the broken, incoherent facts connected with her seizure, and wondering whether Murad were the real cause, when the two Malay girls who had left her for a few moments returned, bearing a handful of wreaths of a beautiful fresh white jasmine, which they insisted upon placing in her thick, dark hair.

Helen resisted this trifling for a time, but despair had tamed her spirit; and after a few feeble attempts to stay her persecutors, she sat like a statue, asking herself, with her eyes fixed upon the gay sarong she wore, whether this was the Helen of the past—and what was to be the end.

The two girls placed the lovely white flowers in her hair, laughing with delight, and clapping their hands as they drew back to gaze at their work; after which one of them went off to fetch a common hand-glass of European make, and held it before her face that she might, as they said, "see how beautiful they had made her now."

Helen was too sick of heart and weary to do more than cast a cursory glance at the glass; but this was followed by another, and then she uttered an anguished cry, shrinking back and cowering down as if with dread as she covered her face with her hands.

Fair Helen was fair no longer. Her face was as swarthy as that of the darkest Malay.

Volume Two—Chapter Fourteen.

Another Prisoner.

The awakening of the Reverend Arthur Rosebury was not very much unlike that of the other prisoners. He, too, seemed to have been carried a long distance blindfolded, both in boat and litter; and it all appeared like a continuation of the dream in which he had been plunged since he first met Helen Perowne.

The hours he had spent in her company; the giving up of his little English home; his journey abroad; and his wild Eastern life, had all seemed dreamlike and strange; and it was quite, to his mind, in keeping therewith, that he should have been seized, blindfolded, and carried off by slaves for some reason or another; probably, he argued, because a rival was jealous of the favour in which he stood with Helen, who had only that night appointed him her special personal attendant.

It was all quite consistent with Eastern life and romance, and did not strike him as being at all peculiar, for the fact remains that, while the Reverend Arthur Rosebury was exceedingly clever as a student, and quite a master in his own particular subjects, he was weak as water in worldly matters; and, as his sister too well knew, in many things little better than a child. Add to this that the Reverend Arthur was, for the first time in his life, and at middle age, hopelessly infatuated with Helen, and it is not surprising that his weakness was extreme.

It was all, then, to him a matter of no wonderment, and he would have taken his position coolly enough had he been satisfied that Helen was not in danger. But of this he could not feel assured; and he was troubled in his dull, mild way accordingly. For love blinded him effectually to all Helen's failings. She was beautiful, and she had looked kindly, almost lovingly upon him, more than once, and those tender looks redeemed all else. She flirted, she coquetted with others; she treated him with marked indifference and contempt; but she had made him love her, and he was one of those who, without reward, would go on patiently loving until the end.

He was a good deal troubled, then, in his own mind about Helen's fate, for he had seen that she was, like him, seized; but in the confusion that followed, what afterwards took place he could not tell.

When he was able to think a little more clearly, he began to ask himself what he should do to help his companion in distress; and of course, ignorant of the fact that he might prove in his humble way a greater safeguard than either of her other admirers, there he stuck fast. What was he to do to help Helen?

No answer came to this question, so there he paused, meditating hour after hour, until he found himself unbound, and free to gaze about him in a pleasant-looking room, whose window opened upon a fairly-kept garden, full of such a profusion of strange and beautiful plants, shining in the heavy morning dew, that, as the Rev. Arthur Rosebury rested his forehead against the bamboo bars, and looked out, he forgot his present troubles in the glories of a rich botanic feast.

He was interrupted by a hand touching him on the shoulder; and turning, he found a couple of tall, well-armed Malays standing at his side, one of whom pointed to a breakfast arranged upon a clean mat upon the floor, and signed to him that he should eat.

The Reverend Arthur sighed, paused, and asked where was Miss Perowne; receiving for answer a shake of the head, and a fresh intimation that he should eat.

This, after a moment's hesitation, he sat down and began to do, evidently in a very abstracted mood.

At the end of a minute he rose, beckoned to one of his guards, led him to the window, and pointing out through the open bars to a very beautiful form of convolvulus he took out his penknife, opened it, and placed it in the Malay's hand, signing to him that he should go out and cut one of the long twining strands.

The man looked at him in a puzzled manner for a few moments, but ended by comprehending; and after saying a few words to his companion, he went out and came round to the window where the Reverend Arthur was watching, and ready to point to the plant, a portion of which the Malay cut, and also a spray of a large jasmine, and brought in.

The prisoner took the plants and his knife, and sat down crosslegged to his breakfast, which became a prolonged meal, full of enjoyment; for between every two mouthfuls there was a long pause, and sections had to be made of the flowers and seed vessels, while notes were made in the notebook the chaplain always carried in his breast-pocket.

Altogether that was a very pleasant meal; and the two Malay guards stared to see how calm and contented their prisoner seemed to be.

Then came a period of depression, during which the chaplain questioned the Malays, making use of all the words that he had studied up during the voyage and since his stay; but they either could not or would not give him any information respecting the object of his inquiry; and he walked dreamily to the window, and stood gazing out once more.

Whatever might be his troubles or perplexities, it was impossible for the Reverend Arthur Rosebury to gaze at the beauties of nature in a botanical form without forgetting the perturbations of his spirit; and consequently he had not been looking out at the wonderful collection of plants, for the most part strange to him, many minutes, before he was signing to the Malay guard to cut him a fresh specimen.

This the man readily did; and with intervals for meals and fits of despondency at not being able to help Helen Perowne, the Reverend Arthur Rosebury passed his first day in prison.

The next was very similar, for he was treated with the greatest of kindness and consideration, except that he could obtain no information whatever respecting his detention or his fellow-captive.

On the third day, upon signifying a desire to have another specimen of the plants in the garden, the guard handed to him one of the little woven caps worn by the Malays, signed to him to put it on as he had not his own hat, led him out through a doorway into the garden, and then said, in fair English:

"You may walk and pick flowers. If you run away you will be killed."

The chaplain stared at the man, and asked him some other questions, but the Malay guard pointed to the flowers, waved his hand over the garden as if to say, "You are free to walk here;" and seating himself upon a stump, he took out his betel-box, extracted a sirih leaf, smeared it with coral-lime mixed into a cream, rolled a piece of nut therein, and placing the preparation in his mouth, he began to chew it calmly without seeming to heed his prisoner, though he was watchfully observant of him the whole time.

Helen Perowne was entirely forgotten for the space of three hours, during which the chaplain dreamily revelled in the beauties of the wonderful flowers of that Eastern land. He had no thought outside the present, and in a kind of ecstasy he wandered here and there till, truth to tell, he began to feel hungry, and hunger made him look up at the long, low, palm-thatched building that was his prison.

Hunger made him also, for some occult reason, begin to think of Helen, and he found himself wondering whether she was confined anywhere near him, and if so, could he make known his presence by any means.

Just then, seeing him gazing hard at the house, the Malay rose from his seat, where he had remained patiently the whole time, and pointing to the open door, the chaplain went in laden with flowers sufficient to occupy him in making scientific notes for the rest of the day.

Chumbley's Coolness.

"I say, this is a rum set-out, Bertie," drawled Chumbley. "I suppose you are there?"

"Yes, I am here, or there, as you choose to call it," replied Hilton, rather bitterly, for his bonds gave him no little pain.

"I will loosen the rajahs now," said the voice that Chumbley had heard all through his unpleasant adventure.

Busy hands were now about them, and a knife was used to cut them free; but their limbs were so cramped by the long confinement, and so tightly bound, that they could hardly move.

Then the handkerchiefs were removed from their eyes, and they lay back on the soft matting gazing about them, the subdued light of the large room in which they found themselves being very grateful to their dazzled eyes.

The man who had set them free from the cords was a stern-looking, muscular Malay in plain cotton jacket and sarong, in whose folds were stuck a couple of formidable-looking krisses; and the place in which the prisoners' eyes struggled with the light was a tolerably large room floored with split bamboo, the walls being for the most part a kind of basket-work of cane, partially covered with native woven hangings, while the floor was pretty well hidden by Persian and Turkish rugs.

Everything looked cool and comfortable; and, in spite of the absence of tables and chairs, there was a good deal of elegance in the way in which various ornaments of bronze and china were arranged about the apartment. Here and there, too, were objects of European manufacture, principally in glass, Italian imitations of old Venice being principally chosen.

Naturally enough the first glances of the prisoners were aimed at the windows, of which there were two, and at the door; but they were evidently strongly made, and though the bars of the windows were but wood, they were stout bamboos externally almost as hard to cut as flint.

The Malay saw their looks; and making a sign to them, he crossed to the door and threw it open, admitting with the rays of the morning sun the glinting of the spear-heads of half a dozen stout Malay guards.

Closing the door, he beckoned to the prisoners to come to the windows.

Hilton essayed to rise, but sank back upon his mats with an ejaculation indicative of pain, for the attempt was full of suffering to his swollen limbs.

Chumbley, though in pain, was more successful, or more full of fortitude, for he struggled to his feet, and heavily tottered across the bamboos and mats to the window, which was covered with a beautifully-scented creeper, and through which a pleasant prospect was visible of undulating woodland and dense jungle.

"Quite fresh to me," muttered Chumbley; "I wonder where we are?"

Not till he had had this glance round did he pay any heed to the Malay, who was pointing to a group below each window of three well-armed men.

"They are to kill you if you try to go," he said, quietly; and then, with a meaning smile, he left the room, fastening the door with some kind of bar.

"This is atrocious!" cried Hilton, as he bit his lip, and pressed his swollen wrists; while Chumbley dropped at full length upon the mats, turned upon his back, and began to rub his legs.

"A—bom—i—na—ble," he drawled.

"That scoundrel Murad is at the bottom of it, I'll swear," cried Hilton. "Hang the fellow! I could shoot him like a dog."

"You should have hung him or shot him before he carried out this game," said Chumbley, rubbing away very softly, and evidently feeling a good deal of satisfaction as his reward.

"It is to get me out of the way while he resumes his attentions to—you know," he cried, peevishly; "but he might have saved himself the trouble, for I've done."

"He seems to have had an idea of going it wholesale," drawled Chumbley, "or else he wouldn't have brought me."

"What shall we do now?" said Hilton, altering his position, for the numbing sensation was passing off.

"As soon as ever I've done rubbing my legs," said Chumbley, "I'm going to have another cigar; and then if they don't bring us breakfast I shall have a nap, for I feel as if it would do Mr Chumbley good."

"Chumbley, I haven't patience with you!" cried Hilton.

"Not when you have pins and needles in your legs, dear boy; but have a weed to soothe you, and then you can philosophise over our trouble. Say, old chap."

"What?"

"No parade this morning—no drill. No anything to do at all but lie here and smoke. Hah! this is a nice one. Look out, old man. Catch!"

To Hilton's annoyance his friend coolly took a cigar from his case, struck a light, and having ignited the end of his roll of tobacco-leaf, he pitched case and match-box to his friend, then lay back and smoked.

For a few minutes Hilton gazed at him in an angry, disgusted manner; but the process of smoking looked so calming in its effects upon his friend, that he submitted to the desire to imitate him, and proceeded to light a cigar himself; but before he had been smoking many minutes, a regular hard breathing told him that Chumbley was dozing, and sure enough he was lying there, heedless of present trouble and that to come, his cigar tightly held between his teeth, and his breath coming and going, as he slept placidly and well.

"I always thought Chumbley cool," muttered Hilton in an annoyed way; "but he really is the coolest fellow I ever met. Why, that villain may kill us to-morrow—to-day for what I know. Oh, it's monstrous! and all through that wretched, coquettish girl."

"I hate myself!" he said, after a few minutes' pause. Why, he did not say, but he, too, lay back and indulged in his friend's bad habit, feeling gradually calmer and more at rest, especially as the furtive rub he gave from time to time at one or other of the places where the bonds had been was mollifying in its effect.

Chumbley was fast asleep; of that there could be no doubt, so Hilton determined that it was his duty to watch for both. He could not go to sleep at a time like this, so he began thinking about Helen, muttering angrily the while; but by degrees his countenance softened, his eyes closed, his cigar fell from his lips, the infection of Chumbley's despised readiness to sleep came over him, and, quite exhausted, he, too, lay breathing heavily, and perfectly unconscious of the lapse of time. Naturally enough he dreamed of Helen and her careless coquettish treatment of his love, which was rapidly cooling down, like the lava after some violent eruption, and giving place to a hard and bitter anger at her heartless ways.

As for Chumbley he was too weary to dream, but slept on as calmly as if he were in his own cot at the fort; perhaps more calmly, for the well-ventilated room was shaded by waving cocoa-palms and the branches of a great durian-tree, while the large leaves of banana kept the sun-rays from the glassless window.

At intervals of about an hour the Malay came in, and stepping softly towards them, seemed to assure himself that they were both asleep, going out directly with a satisfied smile as he saw how calmly they were resting.

"They are brave men, these English," he muttered. "They will do. It is right. They do not know but that this may be their last day on earth, and yet they sleep."

Mid-day had long passed before Chumbley awoke suddenly, as if influenced by the presence of the tall Malay, who was standing by him.

"Hallo, old chap!" he drawled, "have I been asleep? I say, have I been asleep?" he added, in the Malay tongue.

"Since morning, rajah, and it is now past mid-day," replied the Malay, respectfully.

"Here, hi! Hilton! Wake up, old man!" cried Chumbley; and his fellow-prisoner leaped up, looking vacantly before him for a moment or two, and then growing angry as he realised where they were.

The Malay retired at once, and a couple of fresh men entered, bringing brass basins with water, cloths, and English-made hair brushes, and soap. These the two officers gladly used, Chumbley uttering grunts of satisfaction as he indulged in a good wash, and ended by carefully adjusting his short crisp hair.

"That's better, lad," he said. "One feels more like a human being now."

"Yes," replied Hilton, smiling. "It is surprising what a degraded creature a man feels when he has not made acquaintance for some hours with soap and water."

"Come, that's more cheery, my noble. Why, I believe, old fellow, that this affair is doing you good!"

"I suppose I am a little rested," said Hilton, quietly. "Take away those things," he said to the Malays, who both bowed respectfully and withdrew.

"I say, Hilton," said Chumbley, "I suppose this really is Murad's game, isn't it?"

"No doubt. Of course it is!"

"Well, he is doing the thing civilly. I wonder whether he treats all his prisoners like this? Hallo! what's this mean—an execution sheet or a tablecloth?"

"The latter," said Hilton, quickly.

"And quite right too," exclaimed Chumbley. "I say, how hungry I do feel!"

These last remarks were elicited by the fact that the tall Malay had returned, ushering in half a dozen more, who quickly spread a white tablecloth in the English fashion; and to the surprise of the prisoners they were served with a capital breakfast, which included, among native luxuries, coffee, very good claret, roast and curried chickens, and fairly-made bread.

"Look here," said Chumbley, who was staring ravenously at the preparations, "if you have any suspicions about the food being poisoned, don't say a word about it, old man, until I have fed."

"Oh, absurd!" replied Hilton. "Why should it be poisoned?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know!" exclaimed Chumbley. "Only let us leave all other discussion till we have discussed our breakfast;" and seating himself in the Malay fashion upon the floor, he at once set an example to his companion, that Hilton was fain to follow.

"As that fellow said somewhere, 'a child might play with me now,'" sighed Chumbley, and wiping his lips, in token of having finished, he leaned back against the divan. "Done?"

"Yes," said Hilton, gloomily, "I have done."

"I wish you had done being glumpy," said Chumbley. "Why, this is quite a pleasant change. I say, executioner," he cried, in the Malay tongue, "I have emptied my case. Can we have some cigars?"

The tall Malay, who had been standing with folded arms, looking like a swarthy statue, bowed respectfully, and left the room, the men coming in directly to remove the remains of the breakfast; while their leader returned at the end of a few minutes with a box of cigars, a jar of tobacco, and a couple of large pipes, one of which, a kind of hookah, Chumbley at once appropriated, filled, and began to smoke.

"I say, Hilton, old man, failing the costume—which wants brushing, by the way—I feel quite the Rajah. Take it easy, lad. 'Tisn't half bad for a change."

"Hang it, Chumbley, you would make yourself contented anywhere!" cried Hilton, who, now that his hunger was appeased, began to grow angry once more. "Put down that pipe, and let's see if we cannot contrive some means of getting away from here."

"Eh?"

"I say put away that pipe, and let's plan how to get away."

"Not if I know it," replied Chumbley. "The tobacco is delicious, and I'm not going to spoil my digestion by putting myself in a fever directly after a meal."

"But we must make some plans!" cried Hilton.

"Must we? Well, by-and-by will do. I'm very comfortable; and as long as a fellow is comfortable, what more can he want? There, light up and do as I do. I don't know that I want to escape at all if the *cuisine* is to be kept up to this mark."

"But we are prisoners!"

"So we are at the island, man alive. We couldn't help being brought here; but now we are here, we may as well make the best of it. What splendid tobacco! Real Latakia!"

Hilton fretted and fumed; and finding that he could not move his friend, he went to door and window, examined the walls, and looked up at the open roof; but Chumbley did not move, he merely seemed to be studying their position in the coolest way.

"Look here, sit down, old fellow," he exclaimed at last, just as Hilton had worked himself into a heat, "it doesn't seem to me to be of any use to fret and fume. Have a little patience, and let's see whether this has been done by our dark friend, or else what it does mean."

"How can a man have patience," cried Hilton, "seized in this ruffianly way!"

"'Twas rough certainly," said Chumbley, slowly.

"Torn from his quarters—"

"To better ones, my dear old man. Let's play fair. One doesn't get such a breakfast as this at the fort."

"Dragged from his love!" cried Hilton, who did not seem to heed his companion's remarks.

"Well, that last's all sentiment, old man," drawled Chumbley. "For my part I think it will do you good. I say—happy thought, Hilton—Helen Perowne's at the bottom of this, and wanting to get rid of you, has had you carried away. Me too, for fear I should make the running in your absence."

"Do you wish to quarrel, Chumbley?" cried Hilton.

"Not I. You couldn't quarrel with me. But joking apart, old man, I saw enough yesterday to know that you had got to the end of your tether, and that—"

"And that what?" cried Hilton, fiercely; for Chumbley had halted in his speech.

"That she had pitched you over, same as she had a score of others before you."

"Silence! It is a falsehood—a calumny—a damned lie! How dare you say that?"

"Oh, easy enough!" said Chumbley, without moving a muscle. "It's just wagging one's tongue a bit. Bully away, old man, I don't mind; and you'll feel better when you've rid yourself of all that spleen."

"As to Miss Perowne knowing of this—"

"Oh, that's absurd, of course!" cried Chumbley; "but she has pitched you over, old man, and you now belong to the ranks of the unblessed."

"I cannot quarrel with you, Chumbley," said Hilton, cooling down, "because I know you to be too good a fellow to slight; but will you talk sense?"

"Yes, dear boy, of course I will; but I wish you'd try this tobacco. This is sense that I am going to say now. I feel sure that we have been kidnapped so that our new friends may get a nice little sum for us out of the British Government."

"Well, it is likely," said Hilton, whose anger had been of a fleeting nature. "But if they do not get the ransom—what then?"

"That's an unpleasant emergency that it is not worth while to consider until we know that negotiations have failed. It is unpleasant, dear boy, because I suppose we should then get a taste of kris, applied in a dexterous manner peculiar to the Malays, through the hollow of the left shoulder. But that would only be a *dernier ressort*, and a thousand things might happen in the meantime. It will all come right in the end."

Seeing that Chumbley was determined to make the best of their position, Hilton gradually began to take somewhat of the same tone; and agreeing with his friend that at present any attempt at escape would be folly, he partook heartily of the excellent second meal provided for them, questioned their guard, but obtained no information whatever as to where they were and why they had been brought, and ended by seating himself by the open window and listening to the weird noises of the jungle as darkness fell.

Feeling weary at last, Hilton sought his couch, and lay thinking once more of Helen, wondering where she was, but with less excitement than of old; and somehow the sweet, earnest face of Grey Stuart rose like a pleasant picture before him, as he fell asleep, thinking that if Helen, with her beauteous face, had only had the sweet disposition of her schoolfellow and companion, what a lovable woman she would have been.

Chumbley was dropping off to sleep at the same time, and he too was thinking of Helen Perowne, and that nature was guilty of making a great mistake in sending such girls abroad upon the earth.

"In fact," said Chumbley, who was in a drowsy state of content with the rest, good meals, wine and coffee—"in fact, old fellow, I begin to think that women are a great mistake altogether, and I for one am perfectly cured."

Sleep spread her drowsy wings over his eyes at this point, and his heretical notions had no farther play, for his slumber was dreamless, and he like his friend passed a calm and pleasant night.

They awoke early, and breakfasted in keeping with their time of rising; after which, finding themselves quite alone, and seeing that they were not watched, they had a good quiet investigation of the place, doing what Chumbley called, "a bit of engineering."

"Don't seem feasible at present," said Chumbley at the end of the look round.

"Unless we could bribe the guards," replied Hilton.

"Yes, it would only be throwing away energy just at present. Let's bide a wee, as old Stuart would say. I say, old chap, talk about old Stuart, why don't you marry his pretty little lassie?"

"Why don't you keep that Solomon-like intellect of yours to bear on the subject in hand?" retorted Hilton. "I've done with women."

"So have I," said Chumbley. "I'd turn monk if I were offered a nice cell with good shooting and fishing."

"You're a queer fish yourself, Chum," said Hilton, laughing; "but seriously, we must get away from here. It is perfectly absurd! Kidnapped, and nothing else!"

"Quite a romance," replied Chumbley; "but never mind. We shall know what our ransom is to be to-night."

"I wonder whether Harley is taking steps to find us?"

"Sure to be, unless he thinks we are drowned," replied Chumbley. "There's no knowing. I believe my hat went floating down the river."

"I hope not," said Hilton. "If he thought that he would not search for us."

"Not till he heard about the ransom. I say, old fellow, I'm tired of smoking, I wonder whether they have a billiard table, or chess?"

"Pshaw."

"Well, then, a pea-rifle to pot the birds."

"Very likely," said Hilton, drily, as they sat by the open window, looking out at the soft shadows of the coming night.

"I'd give something to know really why we are boxed up here," said Chumbley, after a long silence. "It can't be anything connected with the station, or I should be in a terrible fidget. It must be something to do with us alone."

"Yes," replied Hilton; "but it is all darkness at present."

For the moment it was; but the light came all at once as they sat there having a similar conversation on the evening of the third day, after vainly trying to get some information from their guard, for just before sunset the door was thrown open, and looking very handsome and picturesque, and evidently as if she had paid great attention to her toilet, the Inche Maida entered; and as the two officers started up, she walked straight towards Hilton with extended hand.

Volume Two—Chapter Sixteen.

At Fault Again.

"They'll find out the value of that woman now," said Dr Bolter to himself; "and if I haven't done wisely in marrying her, I'm a Dutchman! Why, it's the very thing! Here am I, Henry Bolter, a duly qualified medical man, physician and surgeon in one, ready to afford bodily relief; and here is Mary Bolter, my wife—fine sound about that," he said, smiling with satisfaction—"my wife—my little wife—no, my wife is best; it sounds more dignified—my wife, ready to afford mental relief wherever it is needed; and here she is."

For just then the quick, pattering step of the little lady was heard, and, reticule on arm, she came in bustling, hot, and red-faced.

"Well, my little woman, how are you getting on?" he said cheerily, as he placed his arm round the buxom little waist, and led her to an easy-chair, proceeding afterwards, with all a youth's tenderness, to take off her broad hat and light scarf, which he carefully laid down for fear of being called to account.

"Oh, don't ask me, Henry," she sighed. "My heart is nearly broken with trouble, and I am doing no good at all."

"Ahem!" ejaculated the doctor, taking her hand and feeling the pulse.

"Don't be foolish, Henry, dear," she exclaimed.

"Foolish? No, my dear, certainly not. Hum! Hah! Much fever and exhaustion. Recipe vin Xeres, cochleare magnum. Brisk osculation after the medicine."

"What?" exclaimed Mrs Bolter.

"You are suffering from weariness and exhaustion, my dear," said the little doctor; "and I have prescribed for you a drop of sherry, and something to take after it."

"Not sugar, Henry? and really I would rather not have the wine."

"Doctor's orders, my dear. There," he said, pouring the sherry into a tumbler, and filling it up with cold water, "I have made it as refreshing as I could."

Mrs Bolter drank off the draught, and made a wry face, holding out her hand.

"Where is the stuff for me to take afterwards?"

"There, my dear," said the doctor, kissing her very tenderly.

"For shame, Henry!" she cried, blushing like a girl. "Suppose anyone had seen you?"

"Well, it would have been like his or her impudence to look; and if it had been talked about afterwards, really, Mary, my dear, I have grown to be such a hardened sinner over that sort of thing that I shouldn't care a bit."

"Really, Henry," said the little lady, "anyone would think you were a boy, instead of being a middle-aged man."

"I feel quite a boy," he said, merrily. "At least, I should if we were not in such trouble."

"And we are, Henry, indeed," said the little lady, sadly. "I'm afraid I'm neglecting you terribly, my dear; but I am obliged to try and help that poor man, who is completely prostrate; and if it was not for the help Grey Stuart gives me, I'm sure I should break down. Have you any news?"

"Not a scrap, my dear. Have you?"

"None whatever. But now really, Henry, what do you think of the matter?"

"Pon my word, my dear, I don't know what to think."

"Don't say you believe they have had a boat accident, dear. I cannot bear to think it possible."

"No, my dear, I don't, and I cannot believe it," he replied. "Here is the case: For there to have been a boat accident, Helen, Arthur, Hilton, and Chumbley must have taken a boat, and they must have all gone in together."

"Or Hilton may have been trying to carry Helen away, and Chumbley and Arthur, who is as brave as a lion in such matters, may have been trying to stop them, or pursued them in a second boat."

"And a struggle ensued, and the boats upset, eh?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs Bolter, with a shudder. "Oh, why did you bring us out here, Henry, for such horrors to happen?"

"I did not know that these horrors had happened, my dear," said the doctor, drily. "Let's see first if the boat theory holds water. I don't believe it does."

"Then you think Murad is at the bottom of it?" she said, sharply.

"I'm for and against," he replied. "Let's wait and see. I don't believe, however, that they are dead."

"Oh, no—oh, no!" said Mrs Bolter, shuddering. "I cannot believe that. I'm afraid it's all due, in some way, to Helen's folly."

"Yes, my dear," said the doctor, "and it has quite upset my intended journey in search of the true Ophir."

"And that's your folly. Oh, Henry, how much happier I should be if you would give up that weakness of yours."

"Sorry I can't, Mary. It's an old weakness that increases with age. Don't be angry with me, my dear."

"I am not angry, Henry; only you do worry me when you will keep talking about Solomon's ships coming here for gold."

"If they'd come here for gold, and you had been living at the time, they would have carried you off, for you are richer than refined—"

"Now, Henry, I will not sit here and listen to such outrageous flattery of a very ordinary little woman," said the lady, looking angry, but feeling pleased. "You must be a very weak man to have taken a fancy to me."

"Let me be weak then, my dear," said the little doctor.

"Hush!" exclaimed the lady. "Here is Grey Stuart at the gate;" and they listened to the click of the Chinese-made bamboo latch, and directly after, looking thin and pale, Helen's schoolfellow was admitted.

She did not speak, but looked at Mrs Bolter in a weary, dejected manner, that made the little lady take her in her arms, kiss her tenderly, and then place her beside her upon the couch.

"Never despair, my dear," she said, cheerily. "There's always room for hope."

"That is what I have been trying to think for days past," sighed Grey; "but the trouble only seems to grow darker."

"Don't say that, my dear," exclaimed Mrs Bolter. "For my part, I will not believe the story of the boat accident; and I have always this consolation—that wherever that foolish girl may be, she has my brother by her side."

Mrs Bolter felt her cheeks burn a little as she said this; for in her heart of hearts she had not the faith in her brother's prudence and ability to protect a lady that she professed.

She glanced at the doctor, and her face became a little hotter, for he too was watching her, and she felt that he was reading her thoughts.

"I will try and be as hopeful as you are, dear Mrs Bolter; but it is very hard!"

"Bless the child! I did not think she felt so warm an affection for Helen Perowne," thought Mrs Bolter; "but it shows how good a heart she has."

Then aloud:

"Oh, how tiresome! Here is that dreadful Mrs Barlow coming!"

"Say I'm out, my dear," whispered the doctor, hurriedly. "I'll slip round through the surgery."

"I cannot say you are out, Henry," said the little lady, reprovingly; "but I will say that you are particularly engaged."

"Yes, my dear—an operation," whispered the doctor.

"I shall say nothing of the kind, Harry!" exclaimed Mrs Bolter, sternly.

"But she will want to see me, and describe her symptoms."

"Then she cannot see you," replied the little lady, with dignity. "I will take care of that."

Dr Bolter stepped out by one door, and he had hardly closed it after him, when Mrs Barlow entered by the other.

"Ah, my dear Mrs Bolter," she sobbed, kissing her in spite of a strong objection evinced by the little lady. "Ah, my dear Miss Stuart, these are terrible times."

She paused, as if expecting one of those she addressed to speak; but save for acknowledging her salutation, they remained silent. "Have you heard the last news?"

"No," replied Mrs Bolter, quickly. "Quick! what is it?"

"A couple of boatmen have come in just now with some more relics of our missing party."

"What relics?" cried Mrs Bolter, as Grey turned deadly pale.

"They have found some scraps of clothing, I believe, and a hat," said the lady.

"Where? Where are they?" cried Dr Bolter, coming in hurriedly, for he had been waiting by the door in the not very creditable position of an eavesdropper.

"Oh, doctor, how you startled me! I wanted to see you?" exclaimed Mrs Barlow. "I fear I am going to have a bad attack of illness!"

Dr Bolter was saved from a bad attack of Mrs Barlow's symptoms, described to him at full length, by the opportune arrival of Harley.

"Here, Bolter, I want you," he said, hastily; and making his excuses for having to leave, the doctor hurried out and joined Mr Harley in the garden.

"You have had something brought in," said the doctor, hastily. "Where is it?"

"Down by the landing-stage. Perowne has got up from his bed to come and see, and Stuart, Murad, and others are down there inspecting them."

The doctor accompanied the Resident to the landing-stage, where, in the midst of a little group, lay some wet and torn rags and a sodden hat, muddied and out of shape; while, squatting hard by the foul garments, were a couple of Malay fishermen, who had found the scraps and other articles amongst the mangrove-roots miles away.

Dr Bolter threw off his coat and rolled up his sleeves to go down on one knee by the muddy bank, while with contracted eyes and puckered brow the young Rajah looked on.

"What do you make of them, doctor?" said the Resident, hoarsely.

"Lady's silk dress that has not been taken off, but dragged from its hooks, and ripped and torn away. It seems to have been rolled over and over in the tide till it became fastened on to some snag."

A shudder ran through the little party, and the doctor continued his examination.

"Hat," he said, turning it over. "Dreadfully battered and soaked; but it is Chumbley's, I think."

"What is that?" said Mr Harley, in a low voice.

"Coat," said the doctor. "Gentleman's; and this is a small white tie."

"Here is a handkerchief," said old Stuart, picking up what looked to be a mere wisp.

This the doctor took and rinsed in the clear river, starting back on the instant, and only just in time for, attracted by the motion of the white handkerchief in the water, a small crocodile of some six feet long partially threw itself out of the stream; but falling short of its prey, the reptile shuffled back and was gone.

No one spoke; but the presence of these creatures in such abundance, combined with their daring, whispered plainly enough to the party assembled what must be the fate of one who was thrown out into the stream.

The doctor took a step or two back, and then, as coolly as if nothing had occurred, he shook out the folds of the handkerchief—one of a very delicate texture and edged with lace, while in one corner were the two letters, "H.P.," embroidered by a woman's hand.

There was a deep groan here, and as the gentlemen turned, it was to see that Murad was resting his face upon a bamboo fence, his hands to his brow, and, turned from them as he was, the lookers-on could see that his breast was heaving, and that the young man was suffering great agony of mind.

"Collect all these together," said the doctor in a whisper; and one of the soldiers proceeded to obey his orders, when the young Malay leaped upon him fiercely, and tore the handkerchief from his grasp, thrust it into his bosom, and strode away.

The Resident did not move, but stood gazing after the Sultan, his brows contracted, and a peculiar look of dislike gathering in his eyes; but he did not speak, and without a word the various relics were gathered into a basket and carried across to the Residency island, where Dr Bolter announced that he would make a further and more searching examination.

Then the party separated, save that the doctor and Neil Harley had a long conversation together, in which the latter related how thoroughly the river banks had now been searched by the boats enlisted to carry the soldiers, who were most energetically aided by the people belonging to Rajah Murad and the Inche Maida, both of whom continued to almost live at the station, only going away for a few hours at a time to see to their own affairs, journeys from which they came back, with the rowers of the small boats they used looking terribly distressed.

"You can trust me, Harley," said the doctor. "I will not chatter, even to my wife, though she is to be trusted, too. How do you feel about the matter now?"

"Feel!" said Neil Harley, quietly. "I feel that little Miss Stuart was right in what she said to me."

“And what was that?”

“That this is a contest between the wits of the Eastern and the European; that we are being deceived; and that Sultan Murad is playing a part.”

“What, after the miserable relics we have just seen?”

“After the miserable relics we have just seen. He has slaves who would die in his service, and who would consider it a merit to deceive the heathen English.”

“Then he is playing his part marvellously well,” said the doctor.

“Magnificently; and if Miss Stuart is right, as I believe she is, for the simple reason that her ideas accord with mine, he is a born actor. That show of grief, and that seizure of the pocket-handkerchief were admirably done.”

“If you believe all this, then,” said the doctor, “why not boldly charge him with the crime!”

“To create a little war, with no better reason than my suspicions? A charge made in face of the most earnest work—while he is striving might and main to serve us.”

“Apparently,” said the doctor.

“Yes, apparently. But you see my position. Here are our two friendly natives both offended, but professing forgiveness, and working for us. I cannot charge them on bare suspicion. I must have some proof.”

“Then why not search land as well as river?”

“How?” said the Resident. “Be reasonable, Bolter. You know as well as I do that the rivers and streams are almost the only roads here. To penetrate elsewhere is to cut your way through the dense jungle. Say I determine to offend the Prince and Princess, and take soldiers, saying I mean to search their little towns, what good would that do?”

“None, certainly,” said the doctor. “They would not leave their prisoners there if they are prisoners.”

“You doubt, then?”

“I doubt, and I don’t doubt. I am not a diplomat, Harley. This is out of my line. If you have a pain, and give me your symptoms, I’ll tell you what causes that pain. I can cut you anywhere without injuring an important artery, nerve, or vein; and I can extract bullets, cure fevers, mend broken bones. I can also classify most of the natural history objects of our district; but over a job like this we have in hand I am at sea. Try Mrs Bolter or Grey Stuart—they will counsel you better than I. Tell me, though, are you going to do anything?”

“Yes. In confidence, I do not trust either Murad or the Inche Maida. This may all be some deeply-laid plot of both to obtain revenge; perhaps to begin ousting us from this place, where we are looked upon with jealousy.”

“Yes, very likely; but what are you going to do?”

“Meet Eastern cunning with Eastern cunning. I am about to employ some people from lower down the river who are now seeking alliance with us, seeing how well it pays.”

“What, as spies?”

“Yes,” said the Resident, quietly. “I do not believe in the present theory of the disappearance, so I shall try these people. If Murad is playing us false, why then—”

“Well, why don’t you finish?”

“I fear,” said the Resident, fiercely, “that I shall go farther than to exact stern justice for this act; for when a man’s feelings are touched as mine are now—”

He did not finish, but turned sharply away, as if all this was more than he could bear.

That night the doctor whispered to his wife to keep her counsel, and not to fret about those who were lost, for Neil Harley was deeply moved; and if something startling did not come out of it before many days were past, he, Dr Bolter, was no man.

Volume Two—Chapter Seventeen.

Becoming Humbled.

The secret of the peculiarly-scented water was explained: it was a stain, prepared for the purpose, and face, neck, hands, arms were no longer those of Helen Perowne—whose complexion was acknowledged even by her detractors to be perfect—for as she again gazed within the limits of that little badly-reflecting glass, it was to see that her countenance now was as swarthy as that of the darkest of the Malays by whom she was attended.

It was a great shock; but there was a trouble even worse to come.

The two Malay girls burst into fits of laughter as they saw her horror, their eyes glittering with malicious pleasure;

and catching Helen's arms in their hands, they laid them side by side with their own, to show her that they were as nearly as could be of about the same hue.

Then they mockingly pointed to her face, and to their own, holding the glass before her again and again, while from the smattering she knew of the language, Helen made out that they were telling her how beautiful she looked now, and that she ought to be grateful for that which they had done.

By degrees, though, the anguish she was suffering seemed to be realised, and to wake an echo in their coarser minds, and they began to soften towards her, speaking tenderly, and patting her hands and cheeks, and at last going so far as to kiss her, as they whispered what were evidently meant to be words of comfort.

"You foolish thing," cried the elder of the two; "what is there so dreadful in it all? He loves you, and you will be his chief wife. It is we who ought to weep, not you."

"Yes," cried the other, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that only about one word in ten was comprehended by the prisoner; "we are jealous of you, for you take away his love from us. The Rajah has talked about you for a long time, saying how lovely you were, only that you were so fair."

"I hate you," cried the first; "but I will not be cruel, for you are in trouble. You have been brought away from your father. I remember so well how I was ready to beat my head against the trees, and to drown myself in the river, when they brought me from my home. But Murad was very angry when I wept, and after a time I learned how to bear my sorrow, and I wept no more."

"I wept, too," said the other, "for I loved a handsome young fisherman, and when they dragged me away from my home I fought, and bit, and tore people, and Murad said I was to be krissed and thrown into the river. Then I thought about the crocodiles, and I felt that it would be too dreadful, and I left off crying, and so will you. There, try and bear it, for it is of no avail to weep. Murad is prince, and what he will have he has."

Hardly one word in ten, but the recurrence of the name "Murad" and "love" were sufficient to make her suspicious certainties; and as she fully realised the extent of her trouble, she shuddered, and sat with her hands tightly clasped, gazing into vacancy, and asking herself what madness had been hers that she should have allowed her folly to bring her to so sad a pass.

She was soon after left to herself, and leaving the matting divan upon which she had been seated, she paced the room, frantically trying door and windows in turn, but only to find all fast. Again and again she found her follies recurring to her mind, and she blamed herself bitterly for her coquetry, and the thoughtless love of admiration which had tempted her to attract the Rajah's notice.

So terribly agitating were her thoughts now, that in her excitement her hands shook, her legs trembled beneath her weight, and her busy imagination coursed on so swiftly that she saw herself the injured, helpless wife of the insulted Malay, the occupant of a zenana, and the slave of the man whom she had maddened by her weakness and folly.

It was terrible; and so black did the future outlook become to her excited imagination, that the only gleam of hope through the darkness was represented by a shuddering belief that it would be better now to die.

Carried off as she had been, unknown to any but the Rajah's followers, and now hidden away in this place, that seemed to be far in the depths of the jungle, there seemed no chance of her whereabouts being discovered; while were it known to any European who should see her, upon what would he gaze but one who was in his eyes an ordinary Malay woman!

This, then, was the goal to which her ambition had carried her. It was for this that she had laughed at the protestations of her many admirers, the humblest of whom she would gladly have accepted now sooner than become the wife, or rather slave, of this petty, half-savage Rajah.

"Poor Hilton!" she thought sadly to herself, as she stood by the window, gazing out at the great green leaves of the jungle. Would he suffer much at her loss? or, feeling too indignant on account of her late treatment, be too angry to care?

Then she began thinking of Chumbley, and wished that he, with his strong arm, were by her side to protect her in this hour of need; and it was a bitter humiliation to her to feel that this man, towards whom she had always felt a kind of good-humoured contempt, should be one to whom she was ready to cling in the time of adversity.

Then the calm, pensive features of Arthur Rosebury seemed to rise before her like an upbraiding spectre, and she, for the first time, seemed to see her cruelty in trifling with the best feelings of a man who was gentle, tender, and true of heart as a woman; she knew now how she must have wounded him, and yet he had borne it all in a patient, uncomplaining way, bearing with her follies, displaying no jealousy, but condoning everything, and seeming only too happy if she paid him with a smile.

There was something very nearly akin to pity and regret in her thoughts at this time; and like some punished child, there came to her mind weak, repentant vows of amendment and simple promises never to do so again.

Lastly, the face of Neil Harley seemed to rise before her, not pitying or pleading like the rest, but with a quiet smile of triumph that made her think upon his words, and what is more, set her longing for him to be by her side to help and protect her.

She passed her hands across her eyes angrily, and seemed to disclaim the wish, but directly after came the recollection of her state, and she uttered a weary cry of misery. She had despised him before—he would despise her

now; and if he could see her as she had seen herself in that mirror, he would turn from her in disgust.

She pondered again, as she grew calmer, upon his words to her, uttered as they had been in his quiet, bantering way—that he would wait his time till she was weary of trifling with others, when she would turn to him and gladly become his wife.

Never until now had Helen felt how true these words might prove, for as she rested her burning forehead against the bamboo trellis of her window, asking the outer air to cool her fevered face—that face that he would never look upon again with the eyes of love—his calm, grave manner of dealing with others seemed so representative of power and readiness to help, that her heart went out to him as to her natural protector, and in a low, passionate voice, she murmured:

“Neil—Neil—come to me before it is too late!”

Then came once more as it were a wave of despair to sweep over her and overwhelm her in misery and despair.

“It is too late—too late,” she moaned. “I might have been happy and at peace, but it is too late—too late.”

As she stood there wringing her hands, she found herself thinking more and more of Neil Harley, and she saw now what she had been too indifferent to appreciate before; that beneath his calm, half-mocking mien there was a depth of affection that she now began to realise to its fullest extent.

And yet he had borne with her follies patiently, merely laughing at acts that she knew now must have given him great pain, doubtless feeling that some day she would sorrow for what she had done, and seek by her affection to recompense him for all that had gone before.

Her heart told her, now that she did turn to him—that she was feeling the strength of his love in the echo it met with in her own heart. She had not known that it was there—this love for him—but it surely was; and now her punishment was to be a terrible one—that of one torn by regret for the love that might have been hers, but which she had cast away.

For it was too late now—too late, and those words seemed to be ever repeating themselves in her ears.

She had never cared for either of those who had been her slaves in turn. Their attentions and service had been pleasant, and they had been in favour for the time; but she soon wearied of them, and but for the fact that Captain Hilton was cast in a firmer mould than either of the others, the days of his love-slavery would have been shorter far. Would he come and try to save her? her heart asked—would Neil Harley come?

She asked this again and again, but each time, with crushing violence, the answer seemed to come that if they did, it would be too late—too late.

It was wonderful how, in the few hours she was left alone, her thoughts seemed now to centre upon the Resident. She remembered her father, and thought of how he would be troubled at her absence; and she recalled Hilton, Chumbley, the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, but only as subsidiary portraits in her mental picture. Neil Harley’s was the principal figure, and his face seemed to smile now encouragement to her as she mentally appealed to him for help, looking to him as the one whose duty it was to afford her protection, and save her from the perils which hemmed her in.

“It will he—it is—a bitter lesson to me,” she thought, as she grew more calm. “He will find out where I am—he will never rest until he does; and when he sees me will he cast me off? No,” she cried, hysterically; “he will have pity on me—have pity—for, oh, Heaven help me! I need it now sorely.”

These thoughts brought calmness to the prisoner, and uttering a sigh of relief, she left the window, and threw herself wearily upon the soft mats spread for her use—neither chair nor table being in the apartment—and there she reclined, wondering how long a time would elapse before Neil Harley could come to her help; for minute by minute her belief strengthened that, well supported by her friends, he would soon be there.

Helen’s increasing calmness gave her a return of appetite, and she gained strength for trials to come by partaking heartily of the food placed before her; and, as the evening advanced into night, she lay down and rested, giving her companions no trouble by fresh attempts to escape.

The bright morning sunshine gave her fresh hope and a sense of cheerfulness which she assumed with beating heart was due to the fact that Neil Harley was drawing nearer, and in this elated spirit she partook of breakfast, the two Malay girls laughing merrily and pausing to place some sweet-scented flowers in her tresses. Then she had to submit while they made some alteration in the way in which they had bound up her hair, showing their teeth more than seemed necessary, and drawing her attention to the fact that they were not only dyed, but filed in a particular way.

They were very attentive, bringing her flowers and fruit in large quantities. Then they brought brighter and gayer sarongs, asking her if she would change, telling her that her darkened face was becoming, pointing to her teeth at the same time, and tapping their own.

She was puzzled for the time, but the explanation was not long in coming.

In the course of the morning, while she sat listening to the babble of the two attendants, but with her ears strained to catch every external sound, she suddenly heard voices outside talking earnestly, and her heart gave a hopeful throb as she turned her head, her fond imagination suggesting, at once, the thought that the excitement outside was due to the knowledge of strangers being at hand.

Helen's hope died out like the flickering flame of an exhausted lamp, as the thick woven curtain hanging over the door was held aside, and a tall, muscular, repulsive-looking Malay woman entered with three others, whom, by their rich dresses, Helen supposed to be the Rajah's wives.

They looked at her once or twice, and then stood talking together in their own tongue. Then they left the room quickly, and returned to speak eagerly, glancing the while at where Helen sat watchfully scanning them, till the tall, repulsive woman, having apparently received her instructions, they all approached the soft matting couch.

It was a strange experience for an English lady, and Helen's heart beat fast as she asked herself what all this meant.

"It is some native form of marriage-service," she thought, to which she was about to be compelled to submit. She had heard of marriage by proxy, and this might be one; for in her state of alarm she was ready to accept any idea, preposterous though it might seem.

"I will not submit!" she said to herself, and setting her teeth fast, she prepared to resist them as long as she had life. This she felt was the meaning of her being attired in the Malay fashion; and gazing from one to the other in an excited way, she drew herself up and awaited the attack, if attack there was to be.

The tall Malay woman came up to her slowly, till she stood smiling beside the couch, while the others seemed to carelessly group themselves together, as if what was to occur was not of the slightest consequence; but Helen saw they were watching her with eager interest all the same.

A fresh regret assailed the prisoner now, and that was her want of knowledge of the Malay tongue, as she sat wondering what was the meaning of the conversation that had taken place.

The tall woman spoke to her then slowly, and trying to make her comprehend, but it was some moments before Helen understood her demand.

"Let me look at your teeth."

Helen shrank back, but the woman's hand was upon her lips, and she forced one aside, laying bare the pure white ivory, and then snatched her hand away with a contemptuous ejaculation full of disgust.

"Bad! bad!" she cried in Malay; and then all laughed, as Helen rose up and drew away from them, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"I will make them well," said the woman, taking a little woven grass bag from her sarong, and drawing therefrom a small brass phial and a steel implement, whose use Helen did not then comprehend.

The woman spoke to her then in an imperative tone, stepped forward, and, taking her arm, tried to force her into a sitting posture; but with a cry of anger Helen thrust her back and ran to the door, dragging aside the curtain, and trying to pass through.

The effort was vain, and uttering some sharp angry commands, the woman advanced to her once more, speaking rapidly in her own tongue, and before Helen could avoid her rapid action, she found herself pinioned by the wrists.

What followed was, as Helen afterwards recalled it, one frantic struggle against superior power. She remembered crying loudly for help, being held back upon the matting, and suffering intense pain, as her tormentors held her lips apart, some of them scolding virulently, others laughing and ridiculing her; and then a feeling of exhaustion came on, and nature could do no more than beneficently bring upon her complete ignorance of the indignity to which she, an English lady, was forced to submit, by steeping her senses in a profound swoon, leaving her at the mercy of Murad's slaves.

Volume Two—Chapter Eighteen.

Doctor Bolter Makes Plans.

"I don't think I can do any good if I stay here," said Doctor Bolter to himself. "I've done everything I could think of, and I am ready to own that it is very terrible; but a month has gone by now, and a doctor who is so used to facing death and seeing people die does not—cannot feel it as others do.

"That is, of course, when a man—his brother-in-law—is dead; but I don't even know that poor Arthur Rosebury is dead, and as we say, while there's life there's hope.

"Humph! How stupid of me! I don't know that there is life, so how can there be hope?"

Doctor Bolter was on his way back home after a professional round amongst his patients. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, and every now and then, as he walked slowly on in the heat, he paused to examine some fly or ant that crossed his path, or settled upon the bamboo railings of a garden.

"Good morning, doctor," said a pleasant voice, that made him start from the contemplation of a spider to a far more agreeable sight—that of the face of Grey Stuart, who looked up at him in a weary, appealing way.

"Ah, my little rosebud," he said, smiling. "Tut! I had forgotten. Why Grey, my child, you don't look well. Hah! this won't do," he continued, letting his fingers slip from her hand to her wrist. "Bit feverish, my dear. Grey, my child, you're fretting about Helen Perowne."

"It is so terrible, this suspense, doctor," she said, pleadingly.

"Yes, my dear, it is very terrible; but keep that sunshade up; the sun is very powerful this morning."

Grey raised her creamy-white sunshade that she had allowed to hang by her side, and as the doctor finished counting the throbs of her pulse, he drew her hand through his arm, patted it into position and then walked slowly on by her side.

"Nature says, my dear, that we must not fret and worry ourselves, because if we do we shall be ill."

"Oh, yes, doctor," sighed Grey, with a pitiful look in her soft eyes, "but this passing away of day after day is dreadful. What are we to do?"

"Wait, my dear, wait."

"Wait!" cried Grey, whose eyes flashed for a moment. "Oh, if I were a man, I think I would find some means of discovering what has become of our friends."

"Well, my little maiden, you are not a man, and are not likely to be," said the doctor, smiling; "but no doubt your advice may be good, though your action might be weak. Now, then, tell me—what would you do if you were a man?"

"I would send out parties to search," cried Grey, indignantly. "Who knows where our poor friends may be!"

"Ah, who knows, my dear inconsiderate little friend?" said the doctor, quietly. "Now, don't you know that for nearly a month past Harley has had, not parties, but single men—natives—out in search of information about our friends?"

"No," said Grey, "I did not know that."

"No, you did not know that, my dear, but he has, and without the slightest success, although he has promised a heavy reward for any valuable information."

"It is very good of Mr Harley, and I beg his pardon," sighed Grey.

"And I take upon myself to say that the pardon is granted," said the doctor. "And now, my dear, I suppose you think that this is not enough, but that we—I mean Harley—ought to send out soldiers?"

"Yes, I have thought so," said Grey, hesitatingly.

"Hah! yes, I suppose so; but it has never occurred to you, my dear, I daresay, that in this jungle-covered country, where the rivers are the only roads, the passage of soldiers, with the stores they require, is a terribly difficult affair."

"I fear it would be," said Grey; "but the case is so urgent, doctor."

"Terribly urgent, my dear; but like some of the urgent cases with which I have to deal, I have to do all I can, and then leave the rest to nature. Let us hope, my dear, that nature will work a cure for us here, and that one of these days they will all turn up again alive and well."

"Oh, doctor, do you think so?" cried Grey, who was ready to cling to the slightest straw of promise.

"I don't say that I think so," he replied, "I say I hope so."

Grey sighed.

"There, there, there, I forbid it," said the doctor, with assumed anger. "We cannot have you fretting yourself ill, my dear, for we want your help. My little wife could not get on at all without you to cheer and comfort her; and I believe if it were not for you poor Perowne would go distraught. Then there's your father, who looks upon you as the one object of his life; and lastly, there's your doctor."

"You, dear Doctor Bolter," said Grey, smiling in his face.

"Yes; that is the person I mean, my dear. Do you want to disgrace him?"

"Disgrace you, doctor?" said Grey, wonderingly.

"Yes, by turning weak and delicate and ill after all I have done to keep you sound and well. No, Grey Stuart, my dear; there are some people in this busy world of ours who must never break down, never want rest, and never be ill in any shape; those people are doctors like me—and clever, useful little women like you. Depend upon it, my dear, if you were to turn poorly there would be a regular outcry upon the station, and everyone would be finding out your value."

"But they used to do without me, doctor," said Grey, smiling.

"Exactly, my dear; but now that they have become used to the luxury of your presence they will not do without it again. No, my dear; you must not turn ill. Ergo, as Shakspeare's clown says, you must not fret. Let's hope, my dear, that all will come right yet."

"I will try and hope, doctor," said Grey, quietly, "and I will not fret."

"That's right, little woman. Depend upon it, two such dashing fellows as Chumbley and friend Hilton will not drop out of sight like stones thrown down a well. They'll turn up again some day. Good-bye. Take care of my little wifie: she's

the only one I've got, you know," he added, laughingly. "Going to see her now?"

"Yes, doctor."

"When is she going to leave Perowne?"

"He is not fit to leave at present," said Grey, shaking her head.

"Then I suppose we must stay," said the doctor, parting from Grey with quite a parent's solicitude; and then he stood watching her as she went beneath the shady trees.

"That little lassie is fretting about one of those chaps," said the doctor; "I'll be bound she is. She wouldn't turn pale and red, and grow thin and weak, because Helen Perowne has disappeared. I wonder whether it's big Chumbley. Well, we shall see. Now about my projects."

He walked slowly homeward and entered the snug cottage-like place, which was the very pattern of primness, and day by day grew more like to the place where he had first set eyes upon his wife.

"Seems precious dull without the little woman," he muttered; "but I suppose I mustn't grumble as she's away to do good to others."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room.

"Dear, dear me," he said, impatiently; "a man, especially a doctor, can't go on bemoaning people for ever. Where would science be if he did? Of course I'm very sorry about poor old Arthur, though after all perhaps he'll turn up all right, with his vasculum full of new orchids. Here's time galloping away, weeks and months and years, and I never get a bit nearer to the solution of my problem. Here am I, as I may say, right upon the very spot, and yet I do nothing whatever to prove that this is the place to which King Solomon sent to find his gold, and apes, and peacocks."

Dr Bolter took off his sun-hat, and rubbed his bald head in a peculiarly vicious way, and then went on debating the question so as to work himself up to the carrying out of the project which he had in view.

"Here's the case," he said. "My wife's out; there's nobody ill, for I've polished off all that needs doing this morning, so when could there be a better chance? I'll go, that I will."

But there came up, as if to oppose him, the recollection of the morning after Mr Perowne's party, and he was obliged to ask himself how could he go now?

"I don't care," he cried, angrily. "I have done all I could, and thought of all I could, and I can do no more. Here's my wife out nearly always now, so that she would not miss me, so I ought to go. I might discover that this is the real site of Solomon's gold mines, and if so—Phew, what a paper to read at the Royal Geographical!"

"I'll go! My mind's made up. I'll go, that I will," he exclaimed; "and somehow I seem to fancy that this time I shall make my great discovery. Hah! yes; what a discovery! And that paper read before the Royal Society—a paper on the discovery of the Ancient Ophir, by Dr Bolter, F.R.S. Why, my name—our name I should say, for Mary's sake—would be handed down to posterity."

Here the doctor gave his head another rub, as if to get rid of a tiresome fly.

"I don't know about posterity," he muttered. "It wouldn't matter to me, as I've no youngsters. Still it would be a fine discovery to make. But—"

Here he had another vicious rub.

"Suppose in the meantime Helen Perowne and the rest of the party come back!"

Volume Two—Chapter Nineteen.

Dr Bolter Takes a Holiday.

That question of the possibility of Helen Perowne coming back interfered a good deal with Doctor Bolter's project—one which he had been longing to put in force for months and months—a project which his journey to England and his marriage had set aside, though it was never forgotten.

"Suppose Helen comes back?" he asked himself often.

"Well, I ought to be here," he said; "but if she were to return in my absence she couldn't help being pleased, for I might have discovered the gold mines. But ought I to tell Mary where I am going?"

"No," he said, decidedly; "she would object. She might agree to my going upon a collecting expedition; but she would say as she said before, that the Ophir question was a myth."

Somehow the more Dr Bolter tried to make up his mind to go, the more undecided he grew. He wanted to make an expedition into the interior very badly, but the hidden influence of that very decided little woman his wife was there still, making him feel guilty and like a child who tries to conceal some fault; and somehow, the more he tried to shake off the sensation, the worse he felt.—"There, it's no use," he cried at last, angrily. "No sooner does a man marry than farewell to independence. They say a man and his wife become one flesh, and really I think it's a fact, for the man is

completely absorbed and it's all wife. The man becomes nobody at all."

The doctor went into his own room, half museum, half surgery, and in a listless, peevish way he began to pull out drawer after drawer of specimens, some of which required examination badly, for the ants were beginning an attack, and this necessitated the introduction of a pungent acid which these busy little insects did not like.

"I might find gold in abundance," said the doctor, as he busied himself over his specimens. "I might make such discoveries as would cause my name to be famous for ever, and here am I tied as it were by one unfortunate step to my wife's apron. Hah! I was a great idiot to sacrifice my liberty.

"Not I," he added, sharply. "Not I. She is a bit of a tyrant with me, and she's as jealous as Othello, but she is an uncommonly nice little woman, and bless her, she thinks I'm about the cleverest fellow under the sun.

"Well, there's not much to grumble at there," he said, decidedly, as he smiled and settled his chin in his collar. "I don't see that I need mind her being a bit jealous of me. It shows how fond she is, and she must be very proud of me if she thinks like that."

This idea gave the little doctor so much satisfaction that for the moment he determined to go up to Perowne's and ask his wife for leave of absence for a few days.

"N-no! It wouldn't do," he muttered, shaking his head dolefully. "She would not let me go. I shall have to make a bold dash for it if I do mean to have a run, and face the consequences afterwards.

"Look here, you know," he cried gazing round at his specimens; "it's about pitiful, that's what it is, and I might just as well give up collecting altogether. Such an invitation from the Inche Maida as I had, to make her place my home, and start from there upon my investigations, only that stupid jealous idea on the part of my wife stopped it! Bah! It is intolerable."

He thrust in a drawer in a most vicious manner; but Doctor Bolter's annoyance with his wife came and went like an April shower. On re-opening the drawer he proceeded to arrange the specimens that his petulant fit had disturbed.

"I shall have to give it up," he said, sadly. "So I may as well make the best of it, and—Hooray!"

Doctor Bolter slapped one of his legs vigorously, as if he were killing a fly, and a sunshiny look of pleasure spread all over his face.

"To be sure! The very idea! I'll carry it out too—just a little—so as to be quite square with her; and who knows but what I might pick up some news of them after all. Why didn't I think of this before?

"Let me see," he continued, thoughtfully, "how shall I manage it? What shall I do? I know. I'll run right up the river—ten miles or so beyond the Inche Maida's—and then strike into one of the supplementary streams, and make straight for the mountains.

"That will be capital!" he cried, rubbing his hands. "Who knows but what I may hit upon some one or other of the old gold-workings; find ancient implements—proofs perhaps that Solomon's ships sailed up this very river. The idea is grand, sir, and I'll be off at once!"

The idea was so "grand, sir," that in that hot climate it put the little doctor in a profuse perspiration, and he walked up and down the room, handkerchief in hand, dabbing his face and head.

"Yes," he cried eagerly, "I may find out something about Helen Perowne and our other friends. I've got a good excuse for going now, and go I will!"

He stood thinking for a few minutes; and then, adjusting his puggree so as to give plenty of shelter to the back of his head, he walked down to the river-side, and one of the Malay boatmen paddled him in his sampan across to the Residency island, where he stepped out and walked up to Mr Harley's official room, to find that gentleman looking older and more careworn than was his wont.

"Well, doctor, what news?" he said, anxiously. "Anything wrong?"

"No; nothing fresh."

"No fever or cholera to add to one's trouble, eh?"

"Nothing at all," was the reply. "No, sir, I can present you with a clean bill of health."

"Then why have you come? Not for nothing, doctor," said the Resident sharply.

"Here, I say," cried the little doctor, "don't be so horribly inhospitable when a man comes to see you?"

"Inhospitable? Nonsense! You have not come across here to find hospitality. Now, doctor, speak out. What is it? Do you know anything?"

"Plainly, no. But the fact is," said the visitor, clearing his throat, "I am not busy now; Mrs Bolter is a good deal away from home, so I thought this would be a favourable opportunity for taking a boat and a man or two, and going up the river to explore a few of the side streams so as to try and find Helen Perowne."

"Rubbish!" said the Resident, sharply.

"Eh?" ejaculated the doctor, who was taken aback by the Resident's quick, unceremonious way of speaking.

"I said Rubbish, Bolter, and I now say Humbug, man! Do you think I do not know better than that?"

"My dear Harley!" exclaimed the little doctor, indignantly.

"Look here, Bolter, you want an excuse for one of your gold hunts—your Ophir explorations. Why don't you go, then, without all this childish excuse? You are your own master."

The doctor was so taken aback by his friend's onslaught that he shook his head vigorously.

"Well, suppose we say Now that Mrs Bolter is away?" said the Resident, smiling.

"Hadn't we better drop that line of argument?" said the doctor, uneasily. "Really, Harley, you know, it's too bad—'pon my honour it is. It isn't gentlemanly!"

"My dear Bolter," began the Resident.

"There are private matters!" cried the doctor, fuming, "upon which no man ought to touch, and my domestic relations are of that kind!"

"I should not have spoken," said the Resident, "only you—a man who can do as he likes about going out collecting—came to me with such a weak piece of sham by way of excuse for your actions, Doctor, I blush for you!"

"Well, come, I will be honest with you; I am going out collecting and exploring."

"Of course you are. I knew."

"Stop a moment," exclaimed the doctor, "let me finish. I should not go, only the idea occurred to me that I might perhaps get upon the track of that poor girl! If I do, I shall follow it to the end."

The Resident said something in a hasty, indistinct tone, and the doctor stared at him, quite startled by his manner.

"Why, Harley!" he exclaimed, "one would think that you were hard touched in that direction!"

"Touched!" cried the Resident, recovering his equanimity, and putting on his official mask. "Why man, of what stuff do you suppose I am made? Am I not answerable to Government as well as to my own conscience for the welfare of all who are here; and do you suppose that I can bear this terrible visitation, even after this length of time, with equanimity?"

"No, no, of course not—of course not," cried the doctor, hastily.

"Well, there, go, and good speed to you. I sincerely hope that you may discover something. Would you like Sergeant Harris with you?"

"No, no, certainly not! I believe in going quietly and almost alone. Look here, Harley, you would trust me entirely if you were unwell. Now suppose you do the same over this matter."

The Resident nodded.

"Now, to tap this subject once again—repetition though it may seem—tell me, after due thought, what is your opinion now? Do you still suspect Murad?"

"I cannot say," replied the Resident. "I did suspect him, but he has been so earnest in his offers of help, and his men have joined so thoroughly with ours in searching the river and scouring the jungle-paths, that there are times when I cannot believe him guilty."

"Have you heard any more from your fresh allies?"

"Nothing," replied the Resident. "They confess themselves at fault; while Murad has been here this morning to tell me that he was put upon a new scent yesterday, but that it turned out to be a false one. This man puzzles me, clever as I thought myself, for I have not found out yet whether or no he has been throwing dust in my eyes. Probably I never shall."

"I am afraid he is deep," said the doctor, thoughtfully.

"Very deep or very shallow," said the Resident. "Some day, perhaps, we shall know. You are going up the river, then? When do you start?"

"As soon as I have had a little chat upon the subject with you know. I will not be very long away, Harley, and you will take care of my people like the rest—I mean have an eye on home."

"Go, and good luck go with you," said the Resident warmly. "Trust me, Bolter, I will do my best."

"You don't think, then, I ought to stay?"

"No; we have done all we can. Who knows but what you may hit upon some clue in your wanderings."

"Ah! who knows!" said the doctor. "More wonderful things have happened, eh?"

"Chance sometimes solves problems that hard work has not mastered, Bolter," said the Resident, smiling. "There, good-bye!"

"Good-bye," said the doctor, shaking hands heartily; and leaving Neil Harley's room, he began to wipe his face.

"I'm afraid I've been acting like a terrible humbug," he muttered, "for I have not the remotest hope of finding Helen Perowne. I wish I were not such a moral coward over such things as this. Poor old Harley! he's terribly cut up about matters, and I must seem strangely unfeeling. What a girl that was!"

"Tut—tut—tut!" he exclaimed. "Why do I speak of her as gone? What a girl she is! Well, so far so good. Harley makes no objection to my going away. Now let us see what the general will say."

Doctor Bolter felt that he had his most terrible task to perform in getting leave of his wife, and he returned home with a peculiar sensation of dread.

"It is very strange," he said; "but I am getting nervous I think. I never feel it at any other time but when I am going to make some proposal to Mrs Bolter."

To his great discomposure he found the lady within. This might have been looked upon as an advantage but he was not, he said, quite prepared; and he sat listening to her accounts of Mr Perowne's state, and Grey Stuart's kindly help. She suddenly turned upon him:

"Henry," she exclaimed, "You were not thinking, of what I said."

"I—I beg your pardon, my dear," he replied. "Of what were you thinking, then?" The doctor hesitated a moment, and then he felt that the time had come for speaking.

"I was thinking, my dear, that no better opportunity is likely to offer for one of my expeditions."

Mrs Bolter looked at him rather wistfully for a few moments, and then said, with a sigh: "Perhaps not, Henry. You had better go."

"Do you mean it, Mary?" he said, eagerly. "If you think the station can be left in safety, perhaps you had better go," she said, quietly. "I will have Grey Stuart to stay with me. I will not stand in your way, Henry, if you wish to leave."

"It almost seems too bad," he said, "but I should really like to go for a day or two, Mary. Harley says he can spare me, and no better chance is likely to come than now."

"Then by all means go," said Mrs Doctor, "only pray take care, and remember, Henry," she whispered affectionately, "I am alone now."

Vowing that those last words would make him come home far more quickly than he had intended, the doctor prepared the few necessaries he always took upon such occasions, and was about to start, when there was a fresh impediment in the person of Mrs Barlow, who came in, looking the picture of woe, and ready to shake hands effusively, and to kiss Mrs Bolter against her will.

"Going out, doctor?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am, for some days."

"But you will come to my house first? there is an injured man there. He came and begged me to fetch you to him, for he could not come himself."

"A Malay?"

"Yes; a native. And he begged so hard that I was compelled to come."

"Just as I was going out, too," muttered the doctor, pettishly; but he never refused a call to duty, and hurrying out, he left the widow with his wife, while he went down to the well-appointed little house sleeping in the sunshine close to the river.

As he drew near he saw, at a little distance, a scuffle going on amongst a party of Malays, one of whom seemed for a moment to be struggling against five or six others; but no outcry was made, and deeming it to be some rough play upon the part of the fishermen, he paid little heed to what followed, merely noting that the men hustled their companion into a boat and paddled away.

The next minute he was at Mrs Barlow's house, where a swarthy-looking Malay presented himself and told his symptoms, which were of so simple a character that the doctor was able to prescribe, and then hurry back to send the medicine required.

This last was received by the sick man from the doctor's messenger; and no sooner was he gone than it was observable that the invalid rose from the mat upon which he had lain. He laughingly stole off to the river-side, where he entered a sampan, and paddled away after his companions, one of whom had left him to personate the only messenger who had been able to reach the station, though only then to fail in eluding the keenness of those who watched every house, and who kept their eyes upon the doctor, when half an hour later, totally regardless of the heat of the sun, he embarked in a boat and was paddled up the river by a couple of men, the companions of former excursions, old friends, whom he knew he could trust.

There were several boats lying lazily upon the water, with sleepy-looking Malays in each, and as the doctor's swift little vessel pushed off, eyes that had looked sleepy before opened widely and watched his departure.

"Shall we follow?" said one man, in a low voice.

"No; he goes to shoot birds. Let him be."

The sun poured down his rays like silver flames through the leaves of the cocoa-palms; and while the doctor's boat grew smaller and smaller till it turned a bend in the stream, the occupants of the sampans lying so idly about the landing-stage exchanged glances from time to time, but seemed asleep whenever the owner of a white face drew near.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty.

Murad's Slave.

It was with a feeling that something dreadful had happened that Helen opened her eyes and stared wildly about her. How long she had been insensible she could not tell, but her impression was that very few minutes had elapsed since she was struggling with her assailants.

She had been roughly used she knew, for her arms felt wrenched and bruised, her head throbbed painfully, there was an acute smarting about her lips, and a peculiar acrid, pungent, bitter taste in her mouth, while when she placed her hand to her lips she withdrew it stained with blood.

She shuddered and looked round at the Malay women, some of whom were standing, some squatted about on the bamboo floor, watching her with a gratified smile in their faces, and one and all evidently without the slightest sympathy for her state.

"What—what have you done?" she panted, with anger now taking the place of fear. "You shall be punished—bitterly punished for this!"

For answer there was a merry laugh, and the women chatted to each other; but one of the girls who had been Helen's attendant rose and left the room, to return in a few minutes with a large braes basin of clear cold water and a cotton cloth.

Helen tried hard to check her sobs, and gladly availed herself of the opportunity to bathe her eyes, finding as she did so that one of her lips smarted and bled quite profusely; there was a wretched sensation too about the lower part of her face, and her teeth ached violently.

"They shall be bitterly punished for this!" she cried, furiously. "What have they done?"

Then, like a flash, as she saw the girl who held the basin smile mockingly, she knew what had taken place, and with a piteous cry she placed her hands to her mouth, to find that her surmise was correct; the second girl laughing heartily, and fetching the hand-glass to hold upon a level with the prisoner's face.

The cold wet dew gathered upon Helen's brow as she gazed at the strange countenance before her. It was not that which she knew so well, and upon whose handsome features she had been wont to gaze with half-closed eyes and with a smile of satisfaction at its beauty; for there before her was the face of a noble-looking Malay woman, between whose swollen lips she could see the filed and blackened teeth considered so great a perfection to her toilet; and with a piteous cry Helen covered her eyes with her hands, shrank back upon her couch, and sobbed forth:

"What would he think of me now?" Humbled as she was by the treatment she had received, and agitated by her position, Helen Perowne had enough of the old nature left to suffer terribly upon every question relating to her personal appearance. It was a dreadful shock to find that she had been completely transformed, as it were, into a woman of the country—one of those upon whom she had been accustomed to look with such disdain; but the shock was surpassed by the sensation of misery to find that her self-worshipped beauty was gone, as it were, for ever. Her greatest enemy could not have inflicted upon her a more cruel pang; and one constantly-recurring question kept repeating itself:

"What would he say to me now?"—*he*; and it was not of Captain Hilton, her father, or any of her rejected lovers that she thought, but always of the Resident. What would Neil Harley think of her if he could see her distorted features? He could not recognise her, of that she felt sure, and in her agony of mind a complete change took place in her feelings. But an hour ago she had watched window and door, listened to every sound, however slight, and interpreted it to mean the coming of help—of Neil Harley and her father to fetch her away. But how could she wish for them to come now? Why should she be taken away? Instead of Helen Perowne, the beauty of the station, they would find, and would not recognise, a swarthy native woman, whose aspect would repel them, and they would be ready to doubt her word should she assert who she was.

She was ready to pray now that no help might come—even that she might die.

The women stole softly away, whispering to each other that she would soon come round; and as the suffering girl crouched there in her abasement her anguish did not grow less poignant, and she found herself, in spite of the repugnance she felt at the idea of being seen, somehow looking once more to Neil Harley for help. She recalled how she had laughed at his pretensions, even to treating them with indignity, and turning upon him a resentful stare; how, too, tried to pique him by laughing and flirting directly with some favoured lover. But what had followed? He had only smilingly told her that he was in nowise jealous, and that she would come to him with open arms at last.

She recalled, as she sat thinking there, how she had turned from him with a haughty feeling of annoyance; while now that she was so cruelly abased he seemed to be her only hope, the one to whose strong arm she was forced to look for aid; and with a bitter wail of misery, as she thought of him once more, in spite of her efforts to drive away the fancy, she kept on asking herself those ever-recurring questions, what would he think of her—what would he say?

"I am too cruelly punished," she moaned to herself, and for the next hour or so she was completely prostrated both in body and mind. For her position was one that must have daunted the stoutest-hearted woman. She could not hope that, now she had been so degraded, if seen, any Englishman would recognise her and so give notice of her whereabouts; while the insolent Rajah might arrive at any moment to triumph over the downfall of the proud beauty of the station.

But somehow, in spite of her peril, her thoughts wandered from the Rajah, and kept centring themselves upon that question of what Neil Harley would think and say, if ever he should look again upon her terribly-disfigured face.

By degrees her sobs grew less painful, and she lay back with her face still hidden in her hands, thinking of the harsh file that had been used to her beautiful teeth, and the powerful stain that had been applied, and wondering why she had not foreseen, after the dyeing of her face, that a further attempt would be made to liken her to the native women. She realised, too, now how strong was the Malay nature in cunning, for their proceedings would more effectually secure her from being found than concealment in the deepest recesses of the jungle. In fact, though she kept her eyes closed, ever staring, as it were, straight out of the darkness, was the swarthy distorted countenance she had seen in the glass, with its filed and blackened teeth; and as this was burned into her brain, she felt that so long as speech was denied her she might be kept even in the native town close to her friends, none of whom would recognise in her the Helen Perowne they sought.

She knew that it was a cunningly-devised and clever plan for destroying her identity, and by it she felt, as she shuddered, she had become as it were one of the Rajah's slaves—one of the wretched, hopeless women branded as his like so many cattle, and in her anguish the hot blinding tears gathered once more as she realised the degradation of her position, and her spirits sank lower and lower as she once more lay back and wept.

At length, after how long a time she could not tell, she was aroused by one of her Malay attendants who seemed to be somewhat moved by her distress. This, the gentler of the two, brought a little vessel of perfumed water, and bending over the sobbing prisoner, she gently removed her hands, and after a little resistance succeeded in bathing her burning eyes and stinging lips, talking to her soothingly the while in Malay, a good portion of which Helen, whose senses were sharpened by her position, contrived to understand.

"Why do you cry, dear?" said the girl tenderly. "I ought not to like you, but you are so handsome, and in such trouble, that I feel sorry. But why do you cry? You cannot tell how you are improved. You were dreadful before with your English look—your sickly pale face, your white teeth and poor thin lips. Now you are lovely and our people would worship you with your soft brown skin and shining dark teeth. The filing has made your poor thin lips grow large and fresh as they should be. Look; they are nearly as big and full as mine. He will love you more and more now, and though I laughed when I saw you first, and thought you a poor weak white thing, now I begin to feel afraid and jealous and to hate you for coming here."

As Helen caught the meaning of these words, fully realising what was meant, and heard her companion speak of someone who would be gratified by her changed appearance, a shiver of dread ran through her, and she lay back staring wildly at the speaker.

"Jealousy—hate me," thought Helen. "Yes; she talked of hating me."

A ray of hope shot through the darkness here.

"She cannot like to have me here, and she would be glad to see me gone. What am I," she cried, mentally, "to crouch here in this pitiful way, weeping and bewailing my misfortunes, asking myself what those who love me will think and say? Have I been such a wretched handsome doll all my life, that now I am cast upon myself for protection my actions are those of a child?"

A change was coming over Helen Perowne, forced by the terrible position in which she was placed, and roused now in spirit, she thought more and more deeply of all this, till it seemed to her that the Malay girl had struck the keynote of her future action, and that after feeling her way cautiously she had but to appeal to this attendant for her aid, and she would win her goodwill in an attempt to escape.

The day wore on, and in spite of herself the weariness produced by exhaustion brought on a sensation of drowsiness that Helen could not overcome. One minute she had determined that she would not yield to sleep, the next she was starting with a cry of fear from a deep slumber which had surprised her almost as she thought.

The Malay girl smiled, laid her cool hand upon her forehead, and kissed her very tenderly—so tenderly that, with a sob, proud disdainful Helen Perowne caught the brown hand in hers, and laid it upon her throbbing breast.

Again the drowsy sensation began to master her, and she started up with a face distorted, fleeing as she believed from some terrible danger. The girl spoke a few soothing words, and gazed so kindly in the prisoner's eyes, that Helen sank back once more, yielding to the powerful influence that came upon her, and almost the next moment she was sleeping deeply, quite exhausted by what she had suffered.

The Malay girl bent over her for a few minutes, and then softly withdrew her hand from between Helen's, to follow her companion to the window, where she was sitting droning over some native ditty about meeting her love beneath the moonbeams among the waving rice, and then they sat chatting and laughing together in a low tone. Now they discussed Helen's features, then her want of courage, and lastly, in a dull indifferent way, they began to wonder

whether their lord would be satisfied with what they had done, and when he was likely to come.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty One.

The Inche Maida at Home.

"Ah, Princess," cried Hilton, flushing with pleasure as he saw help and liberty shining as it were in the face of a friend, whose extended hand he took, "this is kind of you indeed. You had heard, then, of the outrage of these Malay people, and have come to have us freed."

"Outrage!" cried the Princess indignantly. "Who has dared to hurt you?"

"That we do not know," cried Hilton, eagerly. "You must discover that. I am glad to see you indeed."

"And I you," she replied, smiling in the young officer's face, as he retained her hand. "Ah, Mr Chumbley," she continued, extending her left. "I am very pleased to meet you once again."

Chumbley shook the hand stretched out to him, and smiled as he looked curiously at their visitor, for slow of movement as he was, he was quick of apprehension, and he did not place his companion's interpretation upon the meeting.

"I hope you were not hurt, Mr Chumbley," she said.

"Oh, but we were," cried Hilton, quickly, and before his friend could speak. "We were seized and dragged here by a pack of scoundrels who did not spare us much."

"Ah, yes, I have just come," she said. "I heard that you both fought very hard, like the brave, strong Englishmen you are, and some of the men were hurt, and badly too."

"Chumbley there did his best," said Hilton, "of course; but by whose orders was this done? You can tell me, I hope."

"Yes," drawled Chumbley, drily, "the Princess can tell you, I should say."

"Yes," said the Princess, smiling from one to the other. "You were brought here to this my hunting-home in the jungle by my orders, but no violence was to be used."

"By your orders!" cried Hilton, dropping her hand as if it had burned him, and falling back a step, with the anger flashing from his eyes.

"The Princess tells you it is her hunting-box," drawled Chumbley, drily; "she evidently meant to give us a surprise."

"Be silent, Chumbley," said Hilton, indignantly.

"Her highness was afraid that we might not get leave of absence, or that we should decline to come," continued Chumbley.

"Oh, this is too much!" cried Hilton.

"Do not be angry," said the Princess, speaking in a low, sweet tone, full of pleading tenderness. "I know it seems strange to you English people, but our ways are different to yours."

"Well, yes: a little," said Chumbley, who was laughing in a quiet internal way. "You have studied some of our etiquette, but you did not find this sort of thing."

"Will you be silent, Chumbley?" thundered Hilton, indignantly.

"Did you not hear me?" said the Princess; and Chumbley noted that there was a very tender look in her eyes as she advanced and laid her hand upon Hilton's arm. "I asked you not to be angry with me."

"Angry?" cried Hilton, fiercely. "Angry? Why, madam, this is the act of some mad savage, and you professed to be a civilised friend!"

"It is the act, sir, of a princess!" said the Inche Maida with dignity. "One who is as a queen among her people!"

"And do you profess, madam, to be a friend of the English?"

"Yes, Captain Hilton, I have sought to be as far as I could."

"Will you not sit down?" said Chumbley, pointing to the heap of cushions close at hand.

"Not while my guests are standing," she said, with dignity. "Are you going to scold me and be angry too, Mr Chumbley?" she said, with a smile.

"Englishmen boast of being fair," he replied. "If I scold it shall be when my friend has done."

"Oh! I have done for the present!" said Hilton, with a mocking laugh. "Pray go on."

"I have not much to say," said Chumbley slowly; "only that it seems rather a determined way of inviting a couple of fellows to your country home, Princess. It has its good points, though, for you can always make sure of the number you want to have."

The Princess inclined her head as if in acquiescence, and then looked pleadingly at Hilton, whose brow displayed an angry frown, and who had begun to pace the room, making the bamboo laths bend and creak beneath his weight.

"I knew she had taken a fancy to him," said Chumbley to himself, as in his quiet dry way he noted what was going on; "but I never could have believed in this. I suppose I was caught and brought to play propriety, and to act as witness to the native ceremony, for she'll marry Hilton as sure as he's alive."

"Of course you will give orders at once for a boat to be in readiness to take us back?" said Hilton haughtily.

"No," said the Princess, smiling, "I shall not. Surely you are not tired of my hospitality quite so soon?"

"You are trifling, madam," said Hilton, "and it is time this childish farce was brought to an end. I insist upon your ordering a boat to be in readiness at once."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you, Captain Hilton," said the lady gloomily.

"Why have you done this?" he cried. "Why are we brought here?"

"Why have I had you brought here?" said the Princess in a low, musical voice. "Shall I tell you?"

"If you wish to," said Hilton carelessly.

The Inche Maida's eyes flashed at his indifferent manner.

"If I were one of my women," she said, "I could not tell you. If I were only my own simple woman-self I could not tell you for the shame that I should feel. But I am a chief, and as a chief I can speak. I have the right to choose whom I would have for partner of my life, and I have chosen you."

"Chosen me?" cried Hilton, with a look of disgust at the tall, handsome woman before him.

"Yes; because I love you," she replied. "He knows that I love you. I read it weeks ago in his eyes."

"Have you been a partner to this accursed outrage, Chumbley?" cried Hilton fiercely.

"No, dear boy; not *to*, I'm a partner *in* it," said Chumbley, coolly. "Wise question that of yours. Was it likely?"

"No," said the Princess, "he did not know; but you were great friends and companions, and I brought you both. I love you."

He looked at her indignantly.

"I like your friend," she continued, turning and smiling at Chumbley, "he is so good-natured and big, and manly, and strong. I always feel as if he would be a man whom I could trust."

She held out her soft, shapely hand to him, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, Chumbley took it in his, pressed it warmly, and then raised it to his lips before it was withdrawn.

Hilton stamped his foot upon the bamboo floor, and then burst into a derisive laugh.

"Is this real, Chumbley?" he cried, "or is it part of a play?"

"I know what you mean by part of a play," cried the Princess, whose eyes began to flash as she felt the sting of Hilton's words. "It is no false make-believe, but real. I told you without shame, as a chief, that I love you, and that is why I brought you here."

"I am greatly honoured by your attention, madam," said Hilton, mockingly.

"Listen to me," cried the Princess, "while I remind you that I am a poor oppressed woman. I have been trampled upon by my enemies, because I am a woman. I am constantly plundered; my people are cruelly treated; and soon I shall be a princess no longer, for my people will say that I am no mother and protector to them, and they will leave me."

"And pray, madam, what is this to me?" said Hilton, coldly. "Do you forget that I have heard all this before?"

"What is it to you?" said the Inche Maida, drawing herself up, and speaking fiercely now. "Did I not tell you that I loved you? From the first day I saw you I loved you, and said you should be my lord."

"Pon my honour, Chumbley," cried Hilton, "this is too ridiculous!" and he looked his indignation. "Why, what a handsome fellow I must be. Are we going back into the regions of romance?"

"Mind what you are saying," said Chumbley, quietly, as he saw a fierce look of anger in the Inche Maida's eyes, lit by the mocking, contemptuous manner in which Hilton listened to her words.

"Mind what I am saying? I have no patience," he cried. "Pray," he continued, turning to the Princess with a sneering laugh, "does your ladyship intend to marry me now you have carried me off?" The Princess did not speak. "By Jupiter! Chumbley," cried Hilton, bursting into a forced laugh, "it must be leap-year. I had forgotten it, and the ladies are

having it all their own way. May I ask again," he cried, "does your ladyship intend to marry me?"

"Yes," she replied, quietly, and in a slow decided way, "I do. Why do you mock at me? Is it such a hard fate to be my husband—my prince—when I say to you—see how I and my people suffer? You are a warrior—a captain—who can fight, and lead, and train men to defend themselves, a few against crowds. Here is my home—here are my lands; take all—take me and my people. Be rajah, and rule over us all. You shall have my wealth, and the rich things my people will bring you; but train them to fight so that they can protect our lands and make our enemies hold us in respect and fear. They will shrink away then like the cowards they are, as soon as they know that it is a prince who rules, and no longer a weak woman."

"Why don't you join me in laughing at all this, Chum, old fellow?" cried Hilton, who seemed bitter and soured by the treatment he had received from Helen.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Chumbley, sturdily, as he watched his companions intently.

"No; why does he laugh?" cried the Inche Maida, whose fierce dark eyes now grew soft with tears.

"I laugh," cried Hilton, angrily, "because your proposals are absurd. There must be an end to all this. Let me and my friend go away at once."

"And my people—what of them—what of mine enemies?" said the Inche Maida, almost imploringly.

"You appealed to our Government, madam, and they regretted that they could not interfere," said Hilton. "I am honoured by your proposals, but I must say the same."

"I do not understand quite everything you say," she replied; "but do not mock me. I can bear everything but that. Think of what I have said, and forgive me if I have been too rough with you, for remember, if I had said 'come to me,'—you would not have come."

"No," said Hilton, smiling, "I should not."

"You see you drove me to do this thing," said the Princess, eagerly, "and it has made your wrath hot against me; but I ask you to pardon me, my lord. See, I kneel to you for forgiveness. Can I be more humble?"

"Will you be good enough to rise, madam," said Hilton, who was beginning to regret his former mocking way, now he saw the Inche Maida's earnestness and trust in him; and he raised her by her hands, which clung to his entreatingly.

"Shall I retire somewhere else?" said Chumbley, in a manner that might have been taken for either serious or mocking.

"For Heaven's sake, no, man!" cried Hilton; "stay where you are. Madam, will you be good enough to take a seat! There, that is better," he said, seating himself near her, as, in obedience to his request, she sank upon the cushions.

"I will do whatever you wish," she said, humbly.

"Then please remember, madam," continued Hilton, "that you are almost an English lady, and surely you know enough of our ways to realise that you have been guilty of a most foolish act."

"I was driven to act as I did," she said, softly. "You know how I implored for help."

"Yes, I know that," said Hilton, speaking now in a tone of gentlemanly consideration for one whom he looked upon as weak and ignorant. "I am sorry you were not assisted; but now that you have had time to realise our positions, I must tell you that what you propose is impossible."

The Princess, who had been seated in a humble, supplicating attitude, no sooner heard this last word than she sprang to her feet.

"It is not impossible!" she cried fiercely; and her eyes flashed with anger as she drew herself up to her full height.

"I am compelled to contradict you, madam," said Hilton, also rising; "and to tell you that, even were I disposed to accept your strange offer, I could not, for I am an officer in the service of her Majesty the Queen, and I could not leave my duties, even at your command."

"But you would have more and greater duties here," cried the Princess. "Your people wish to improve ours. Come, then, and be chief and rajah over my children."

"I tell you, madam, it is impossible," said Hilton, coldly.

"I say it is not impossible," she retorted, proudly. "Did not a brave Englishman become a rajah in Borneo, where they are people similar to ours? and is not the name of Rajah Brooke, of Sarawak, held in veneration to this day?"

Hilton uttered an impatient ejaculation, and glanced at Chumbley for help; but that gentleman was balancing himself upon his toes and gazing at the Princess.

"I was angry a minute since," she said, smiling a very sweet smile, and she looked a very Cleopatra of the jungle. "You will not say no," she continued, appealing to her prisoner. "I am a Princess, and once more I say boldly, what none of my people dare confess for very shame, I love you, Captain Hilton, and once again I ask you to make me your wife. Listen; you do not know how great and happy your life shall be, for your wishes shall be all obeyed, and—"

"Pray listen to me, madam!" cried Hilton, sternly, "you must know that this cannot be. But let us part friends, and no punishment shall follow this foolish escapade. So at once pray order your people to prepare a boat, that I and my friend may go."

He turned now to Chumbley, who had thrust his hands down as far as possible into his pockets, and stood looking very stern and cold, but evidently pondering deeply upon all that had been said.

The Princess clenched her hands, and stood there with flashing eyes, gazing from one to the other, and for some moments it seemed as if she could not speak.

"No," she cried at last, in a short, angry voice, "no boat shall take you back!"

"Then we must go back without," said Hilton, firmly. "Now, Chumbley, this folly has gone too far. Come quickly, and use force if we are driven to it by this foolish woman's acts!"

As he spoke he moved towards the door, and laying his hand upon the latch, he threw it open so that it struck loudly against the bamboo wall.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Two.

"Our Position Is Absurd."

As the door flew open, Hilton found himself confronted by a dozen spearmen; and he would have still advanced had not Chumbley held him back.

"You forgot that you were a prisoner," said the Princess, quietly, but with a triumphant look in her eyes. "There are fifty more brave men beyond those, and they would kill you at a word from me."

"And that word you would not speak," said Hilton, smiling in her face.

"Why not?" she cried defiantly.

"For several reasons," he said, quietly. "First, because I am an officer of the Queen of England, madam."

"I am queen here," she retorted. "What is your queen to me?"

"Another reason is—that you would not have me killed," he said, lightly; and he evaded Chumbley's touch and stepped through the door; but six razor-keen spear-points were presented so suddenly at his breast, that, brave as he was, Hilton involuntarily started back, and to his great annoyance the Princess smiled mockingly in turn.

Captain Hilton was a soldier, and ready to risk his life when need should be; but he felt that there were limits even to the valour a man should show, and this was evidently a time to make a movement towards the rear.

He turned to Chumbley, to find that he had not moved, but was leaning, with his arms folded across his broad chest, against the wooden framework of the cane-woven wall, and he looked his companion steadily in the face.

"Well!" exclaimed Hilton, angrily, as he sought some object upon which to vent the spleen rising within his breast; and his friend being the nearest object, he received the verbal blows. "Why don't you come and face these scoundrels with me? Are you afraid?"

"Eh? Afraid?" said Chumbley, rousing himself from his dreamy state. "No, I don't think I was, old fellow. I was wondering whether we were British officers in a Malay jungle facing realities, or the same two fellows fresh from dining at the club, turned into a couple of stalls at a theatre and watching the progress of some drama of a certain type."

"Then wake up to the fact that it is reality!" cried Hilton, sharply, "and help me to act, unless you want to stay here for life."

"All right, dear boy," said Chumbley, resuming his drawling style. "Only, what are we to do? I'm ready for anything almost, but I'm not going to run my noble chest against those fellows' spears. Where's the good?"

"Good?" cried Hilton, angrily; "are we to stop here and be a pair of slaves?"

"No; only it's as well to wait. There are times to fight, and there are times when it's as well to draw off your forces, even if the London papers do revile and talk of want of pluck. You see a fellow can't fight in a case of this sort. It's ridiculous."

"Ridiculous indeed!" cried Hilton; as, with the petulance of a boy, he seized the door, and slammed it in the face of the Malays.

"Exactly," drawled Chumbley, glancing at the Princess, who was watching them from the other end of the room. "You see, Warner or Terriss on the Adelphi stage would have knocked all those fellows over like skittles, or skewered them all upon one spear like a row of larks; but that's only done upon the boards; a fellow can't play like that in common life."

"Is there much more of this, Chumbley?" said Hilton, with mock deference.

"Not a great deal, old man," said the big fellow, coolly ignoring his friend's sarcastic manner. "I was only going to say—and I hope her majesty Queen Cleopatra can't hear me—that the only course open to us seems to be to wait our chance and bolt; and I'll be blest if I run, or try to run, through this sweltering jungle to save myself or anybody else. If you'll have me carried down to the river and pitched in, I don't mind trying to swim."

"Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha! Ha—ha—ha—ha—ha—ha—ha!"

A merry, almost girlish laugh rang out; and as the two officers turned sharply, it was to see that the Inche Maida's countenance had lost its look of annoyance, and was full of mirth, for she had heard every word that Chumbley had spoken.

"Tchah!" ejaculated Hilton; "our position is growing more and more absurd?"

"You are a very droll man," said the Princess, turning to Chumbley. "You make me laugh by your way of speaking; but you are very wise and clever all the same. You know that you could not get away; so you are ready to wait patiently to see what comes. You are quite right, Mr Chumbley, and I like you more and more, and will treat you well."

"That's very kind of you, Princess," said Chumbley, slowly; "and I must say that I heard what you said before about me; but speaking like a persecuted maiden in the ancient castle of some baron bold, will you excuse me if I say your previous remarks are insufficient, and I should be glad to know why the dickens you brought me here when you wanted him?"

"You make such long speeches," cried the Inche Maida, "and you speak so slowly, that you puzzle me. I never know whether you are serious or laughing at me."

"Oh, I am not laughing," said Chumbley, slowly.

"Then do not ask," said the Princess, shortly. "You are my prisoners, and must submit."

"For the present, madam," said Hilton, with a return of his anger; "but if you will take my advice, you will end this sorry farce at once. You will regret it if you stop too long, and find your palm-tree palace—"

"It is no palace," said the Princess, quietly, "only a simple house."

"Surrounded by a company of our troops, and burned to the ground."

The Princess laughed.

"I understand you," she said, nodding her head; "but that will not be. You English are strong and have great weapons that would destroy us at a touch. We have but our spears and krisses, so we trust to our wisdom to help us out, do you see."

"I think I know what you mean," said Chumbley, quietly.

"Yes," continued the Princess, "you are right; your soldiers would soon burn down my place and kill my people to get you back; but they would have first to find us out. Do you know where you are?"

Hilton glanced at the open window, to see through the lattice-work of bamboo the deep green of the impenetrable jungle.

"Yes," she continued, smiling at the look which came upon the young officer's face, "we bring cunning to fight upon our side. You see that you are in the jungle; and I tell you there is but one narrow path to this place, and my people guard it night and day."

"When they are not asleep," muttered Chumbley.

"I made this place," she said, "to flee to when my enemies should come. Here I am safe, and here, too, you are safe, for none but my most trusted people know the way."

"Pleasant news this, old fellow," said Chumbley.

"Pleasant!" cried Hilton; "but she shall smart for it. She does not think of what will be the result."

The Inche Maida frowned as she saw his angry looks and heard his words.

"Well, old fellow," said Chumbley; "it seems to me that we are wasting time."

"What! are you prepared to make a dash for it?" cried Hilton.

"Not I. I mean wasting time in talking like this. I'm sorry for you, old fellow—very sorry for you; but it's very hot and tiring this standing about. Hadn't we better make the best of it?"

"Best of it!" cried Hilton, who now obstinately refused to glance at the author of their trouble, and kept pacing up and down like a caged beast. "Are you mad?"

"Very," whispered Chumbley; "but one can't pitch into a woman. She fights with cunning, so must we, and wait for our chance to escape. There, it is of no use to chafe. Let's be thankful that matters are no worse."

"Worse!" cried Hilton, passionately, "they could not be worse;" and he spoke loudly enough for the Princess to hear his words.

"There—there, old fellow, calm down," drawled Chumbley. "Make the best of it till her ladyship here has grown tired of her two caged birds, and has let us out. We are prisoners, I suppose, Princess?" he said, aloud.

"Prisoners or visitors, which you please, Mr Chumbley," she said, smiling. "Let it be visitors, for though Captain Hilton has said such cruel things—see, I am not angered, but quite calm. You are my visitors, then; but you cannot get away until I give the word."

"Or our people fetch us," said Chumbley, throwing himself upon one of the divans with a sigh of relief, for the Inche Maida had pointed to the seat.

"They will not come to fetch you," said the Princess, smiling.

"Why not?" said Hilton, sharply. "I tell you they will search till we are found, and then you destroy yourself by having us here."

"Yes," said the Princess, with her eyes half-closed; "they will search. They have searched, and have given it up. They found a small boat upset upon a bank of sand; part of your clothes were in it, and they think you were both drowned."

"Confusion!" cried Hilton, fiercely.

"You have a woman to fight with," said the Princess, smiling, "and I have taken my steps so well that no one will seek you here. I told my people to bring you both, and they obeyed. They would have sooner died than failed."

"Tell me more," said Chumbley, quickly. "Have you seen Mr Harley?"

"I will tell you nothing," said the Princess, "till you are both my friends. There, I must leave you now. Promise me you will be patient, and not so foolish as to try to escape and fight. It would be horrible to me if you or any of my people should be hurt in some mad attempt. Promise me you will be patient and not try."

"Not I," said Chumbley, laughing. "I shall try to escape, and so will he."

"Then you are wicked and foolish!" cried the Inche Maida, angrily.

"Both, I am afraid," said Chumbley. "I always was; but may I make a request as a prisoner?"

"As a visitor, yes," said the Princess, smiling. "May I ask, then, if you propose to gild the bars of our cage?"

"I do not understand," she replied, gazing at him earnestly.

"I mean that it is very hot. May I have a cold drink of some kind; and do you allow smoking in the drawing-room?"

The Princess smiled, and in what Chumbley afterwards called the Arabian Nights style, clapped her hands, when a couple of Malay slave-girls ran in, received their orders, and hurried out again, while their mistress walked to the window, as she had done more than once before, apparently with the idea of giving her prisoners an opportunity to converse and debate their position.

"Well, Hilton, old man, what do you think of this?" said Chumbley, smiling. "We Europeans have gone ahead, and got steam and electricity, and all the luxuries of civilisation, as the fine writers call it, while the East has stopped just where it was, and we might be Ali Baba's Brothers, or the One-eyed Calender, or some other of those Arabian Night cock-o'-waxes here amongst all these slaves and spearmen. I say, I think I shall write a book about it—'The adventures of two officers taken prisoners by a wicked queen.'"

"Chumbley," retorted Hilton, "you used to have one good quality."

"Had I? What was that, old man?"

"You were a fellow who didn't talk much," said Hilton; "but now your tongue goes like a woman's, and you are a positive nuisance."

"Thankye, old fellow. But you ought not to grumble, seeing how impressionable you have of late proved to the prattling of a woman's tongue."

"The Inche Maida's?" said Hilton, in a low voice. "Well no: not exactly hers, dear boy. But I say, Hilton, she is a woman and a lady; don't say hard things to her."

"Hard things?" cried Hilton, angrily. "Come, I like that! Hang it, man, after this outrage she ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum!"

"Humph!" said Chumbley, slowly. "I don't know. They say love is a sort of lunacy, and people do strange things who get the disease badly. You're been an awful idiot lately!"

"Chumbley, do you want me to strike you?" cried Hilton, fiercely.

"No, dear boy," drawled his friend; "but you can give me a punch if it will do you good. I shan't hit you again."

“Bah;” ejaculated Hilton. “There’s no quarrelling with you!”

“Not a bit of it dear boy; but as I was saying, seeing what stupid things you did about—”

“Chumbley!”

“All right: I wasn’t going to mention her name. I say, seeing what stupid things you did, it was not surprising that a lady in love with your noble features and Apollo-like form—”

“I declare I shall forget myself directly!” cried Hilton, between his teeth.

“No: don’t, old fellow; but you might let me finish my speech. It isn’t often I’m flush of words, and when I am you check me. I say once more it was not so very surprising that her ladyship here should set a trap for you, catch you, and want to persuade you to accept her very eligible offers. There, sit down, man, and make the best of it! Stop that irritating walk of yours! You are like a human pendulum!”

“Idiot!” muttered Hilton, between his teeth, glancing at the Princess’s back, though, as she leaned in a graceful attitude against the window, with her arm through the bamboo bars.

“Calling names!” said Chumbley, coolly. “Imitation’s the sincerest form of flattery. Will you stop that wolf-in-a-cage walk?”

“No!”

“Then you’re a Zoological Gardens beast! I say, why don’t you utter a short howl every time you turn?”

“If you cannot talk sensibly, Chumbley, pray be silent!” said Hilton, in a low, angry whisper. “You are like a big boy more than a man!”

“Go on, old fellow!” said Chumbley, coolly. “If ever I marry, which isn’t likely, I daresay I shall have a woman with a tongue like an arrow. What a chance she will have to shoot sharp words at my thick hide!”

“Will you talk sense for a few moments before this woman goes?”

“Lady.”

“Well, lady, then! I want to try and devise some plan for getting away.”

“What’s the hurry?” said Chumbley. “We’re caught and caged, and I have always noticed that the birds that are trapped and caged are of two kinds.”

“Is there much of this moral sermon to come?”

“No,” said Chumbley, good-humouredly, “not much. It seems tiresome to you because you are standing. Sit down, man, and listen. I feel quite like an Eastern speaker of parables. It is the atmosphere, I suppose. I was saying that the birds that are caught are of two kinds—those that take it coolly and those that don’t. Those that don’t keep on beating their breasts against the bars, and knocking their feathers off in the most insane way, till they die, looking exceedingly bare and uncomfortable; while those that take it coolly sit upon the perches, set up their feathers till they look nice and plump, and keep on saying ‘*chiswick*’ except when they stop to eat their seed.”

“And, most profound moralist, the restless, brave-hearted birds that breast the bars are the truest,” cried Hilton. “I would not be so spiritless and craven for worlds.”

“Stuff!” said Chumbley. “Nobody’s going to wring your neck and put you in a pie; then it would be uncomfortable. The Princess only wants you to sing. I say, I think I shall ask her if she means to give us the seed that is becoming necessary in the shape of dinner.”

The Inche Maida turned round.

“I could not help being a listener, Mr Chumbley,” she said, quietly; “and surely you did not suppose that you could both talk like that unheard. Now let me speak before I go.”

Chumbley bowed, and Hilton folded his arms, leaning against the wall, while his friend slowly rose, and once more offered the Princess a seat.

“No!” she cried, angrily. “I can only sit with my friends, and you persist in treating me as an enemy. As Captain Hilton’s friend, I ask pardon for the roughness of my people. Can I do more?”

“Well, yes,” said Chumbley; “after we have granted your pardon, you can set us free!”

“That I shall not do!” she cried, with her eyes flashing.

“Not now, Princess,” said Chumbley, speaking calmly, seriously and well; “but after a little reflection. You do not realise the power of England, madam. You do not know what our Government will always do to maintain the honour and prestige of our nation.”

“No,” she said, scornfully, “I do not.”

“Let me tell you then,” said Chumbley, with a return of his dry, sarcastic manner; “I am of no consequence whatever

as compared to our handsome young captain there.”

“I think you a ten times better man, and one hundred times as much a gentleman,” cried the Princess, hotly; and her eyes flashed indignation at them both.

“Oh, no,” said Chumbley; “you are angry and indignant, and you forget that we are, too. How can we be pleased that you have so roughly brought us here?”

“But you ought to be, and very proud,” she cried sharply.

“Well, we will not argue that,” said Chumbley; “but I wish to tell you that you must think this over carefully and well. Insignificant as we two men may be, it touches England’s honour that a Malay ruler should seize us and make us prisoners.”

“I care not,” she retorted. “I have thought it over well.”

“I suppose so, madam,” said Chumbley; “but let me tell you that England will not let us stay here your prisoners; sooner than let you triumph she would send an army to search for and take us back.”

“And I tell you,” cried the Princess, fiercely, “that I have thought well over all this, and have made such plans, that even if your people did not think you dead, they would not find you. I am queen with my people, and I will not be beaten when I undertake a task. If they should learn that you were here, and come to shoot and burn, we would flee into the jungle.”

“Where they would hunt you out, Princess, cost what it might,” said Chumbley.

“Let them,” said the Inche Maida, with her eyes flashing, and looking very queenly as she spoke. “They are big and strong, and they have many men. They would surround us then, and think to take us and drag you away; but they do not know our people yet—they do not know what a Malay Princess would do. Mr Chumbley,” she said, speaking to him, but gazing at Hilton as she spoke, “we Malays are gentle and calm, but we have angry passions. If you rouse the hot blood within us, it becomes fierce and hotter still. Don’t think that I shall not have my way; for I tell you that at the last, sooner than be conquered by those your people sent, I would kill you both, and then—then,” she cried excitedly, “I should kill myself!”

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Three.

Why Chumbley was Brought.

As the Inche Maida uttered her angry threat she swept out of the room, leaving the two young officers staring at the heavy curtain that closed the door.

“The fury!—the tigress!” exclaimed Hilton.

“Well, I don’t know!” drawled Chumbley. “She seems to me very much like what woman is all the world round.”

“Why, she is a blood-thirsty savage!” cried Hilton.

“No: only a woman who has lived all her life where every man carries a sharp-pointed weapon. Englishwomen are much the same at heart.”

“Why, you blasphemer against the honour of our fair English maids and dames!” cried Hilton, laughing.

“Not !” said Chumbley. “They don’t live amongst people who carry daggers and spears. We go unarmed—I mean Europeans—and pay soldiers to do our fighting for us; but you baffle a woman of spirit—you cross her and behave badly to her, and you see if she wouldn’t fight.”

“Fight, man?”

“Yea, but not with a dagger; she would fight with her tongue—perhaps with her pen—and sting and wound, and perhaps pretty well slay her foe.”

“But this woman is outrageous!” cried Hilton. “Our English ladies are all that is soft and gentle.”

“Sometimes,” said Chumbley; “some of us get an ugly stab or two now and then.”

“Out upon you, slanderer!” cried Hilton, laughingly, as he paced up and down once more.

“If you don’t stop that irritating, wild beast’s cage-walk,” said Chumbley, “I’ll petition the Inche Maida to have you chained to a bamboo.”

“Pish!” cried Hilton, imitating his friend, and throwing himself down upon one of the divans.

“I thought the other day that I was stabbed to the heart by a pair of glittering eyes,” said Chumbley; “but being a regular pachyderm, the wound only just went through my skin, and I soon healed up.”

“How allegorical we are getting!” said Hilton, laughing.

"Yes," replied Chumbley, coolly, "very. Then there was my friend Hilton: he did get a stab that pretty well touched his heart, and the wound smarts still."

Hilton sat up, and glared at his friend.

"And yet he calls a woman a tigress and a savage because she utters threats that an Englishwoman would hide out of sight."

"You are improving, Chumbley."

"Yes, I am," said the other.

"Now, are you ready to try and escape before we are krissed?"

"Bah!—stuff! She wouldn't kris us! She'd threaten, but she wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, unless scissoring off one of your Hyperion curls injured it when she took it for a keepsake. I'm going to prophesy now."

"Going to what?"

"Prophesy—set up as a prophet. Are you ready?"

"Ready?"

"Yes. Can you bear it?"

"If you are going to chatter away like this," said Hilton, contemptuously, "I shall pray her Malay majesty to find me another cell. There, go on. What is your prophecy?"

"That as soon as the bit of temper has burned out, madam will come back smiling and be as civil as can be."

"Not she," said Hilton. "Hang the woman!"

"Where?" said Chumbley. "Round your neck?"

"No, round yours. I'm sorry I was so rough to her; but it is, 'pon my honour, Chum, such a contemptible, degrading set-out, that I can't keep my temper over it."

"You'll cool down after a bit," said Chumbley, yawning. "I say, though, I'm hungry. I shall protest when she comes in again. She pretended that she was sending those girls for drinks and cigars. I say," he cried, excitedly, "I shall protest or break the bars of the cage, or do something fierce, if that is her game."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, if she is going to starve you into submission, I'll give in directly if it's to be that. There, what did I say?" he whispered, as the folds of the heavy curtains were drawn aside, and the Inche Maida entered, looking quite calm and almost sad now as she approached.

"I am sorry," she said, holding out her hand to Hilton, who rose and bowed, but did not attempt to take the hand she offered.

"I was very angry," continued the Princess, in a low, penitent voice. "Malay women let their feelings get the mastery when they are angry. I suppose English ladies never do?"

Chumbley coughed slightly and made a grimace.

"Mr Chumbley," she said, turning to him, "you will shake hands? I am not angry now. *You* need not be afraid."

"I wasn't afraid," said Chumbley, taking the hand and pressing it warmly.

"You were not?" she cried, with a flash from her dark eyes.

"Not a bit," he said, laughing.

"Suppose I said I would kill you?" she cried.

"Well, it would be quite time enough to feel afraid when the operation was about to be performed," said Chumbley, coolly. "I never meet troubles half way."

"I cannot understand you," said the Princess. "You are a very strange man. It is because you are so big, I think, that you are not afraid."

Chumbley bowed.

"Perhaps so," he said.

"I came back," said the Princess, "to tell you that I was sorry I spoke so angrily; but you must both know that I will be obeyed. If I were not firm, my people would treat me like you do your servants. I wish to speak to you both now."

"Say a civil word to her, Hilton," whispered Chumbley.

"Tell her to put an end to this absurd piece of folly," said Hilton, in the same tone. "We shall be the laughing-stocks and butts of the whole service."

The slight twitch at the corner of the Inche Maida's mouth betrayed the fact that she had heard their words, but she took no notice, and went on addressing Chumbley now.

"I ask you both to share my home," she said. "You are his friend, Mr Chumbley, and I know he likes you, so I felt that it would be too much to expect him to be quite happy here without an English friend. Besides, I know how great and good a soldier you are."

"I modestly accept your praise, madam," said Chumbley, "but I haven't seen yet the record of my noble deeds."

"You puzzle me when you speak like that," said the Princess. "You are laughing at me; but I will not be angry with his friend, whom I brought to be companion, counsellor, and guide."

"So you had me kidnapped to amuse Captain Hilton—eh?" said Chumbley. "Well, really, madam, I am honoured!"

"Not only for that!" said the Princess, eagerly. "Do I not make you understand? You are a soldier and a brave man!"

"How do you know that?" said Chumbley, with a good-humoured twinkle in his eye.

"How do I know?" cried the Princess. "Would the English Queen have chosen you to guard Mr Harley with your men if you were not? My people know already that you are brave. You beat them so that they could hardly master you; and they talk about you proudly now, and call you the great, strong brave rajah."

"Well, it's very kind of them," said Chumbley, drily; "for I laid about me as heartily as I could."

"Yes, they told me how you fought, and I was glad; for they would have despised you if you had only been big, and had let them tie you like a beaten elephant."

"That comes of being big, Bertie," said Chumbley. "You see, they compare me to an elephant."

"I have commanded that you shall be chief captain for your friend, and lead our fighting men, as well as being Tumongong, my lord's adviser. A chief is trebly strong who has a brave and trusty friend."

"I say, old man, do you hear all this?" said Chumbley.

"Yes, I hear," said the other, quietly.

"This is promotion with a vengeance! Yesterday lieutenant of foot, to-day commander-in-chief of her highness the Inche Maida's troops."

"Yes, you shall be commander," said the Princess, seriously. "It will save my country, for my people will follow you to the death."

"Well, 'pon my word, Princess," said Chumbley, merrily, "you are a precious clever, sensible woman, and I like you after all."

"And I like you," she said, innocently. "I do not love you, but I like you very much, you seem so brave and true, and what you people call frank. You will help me, will you not, both of you? Think how I appealed to Mr Harley for help—how that almost my life depends upon it—and what did I get but empty words?"

"You did not get much, certainly," said Chumbley.

"Then talk to your friend, and advise him. He will do what you say."

"No," said Chumbley, laughing, "that is just what he will not do. If ever there was a man who would not take my advice, it is Hilton."

"Try him now that he is here—now that he knows how useless it is to fight against his fate. Speak to him, and speak kindly!" she whispered. "I am going to my women now."

She took one step towards Hilton, holding out her hand to him in a gentle, appealing manner; but he only bowed distantly, and turned away.

The soft, appealing look passed from the Inche Maida's face, giving place to an angry frown; but this died out as she turned to Chumbley.

"We two are friends, I hope?" she said, holding out her hand. "You are not angry with me?"

"Well, not very," he replied, smiling; "one can't be angry with a woman long for such a trick as this."

"Yes," she said, quickly, "it is a trick, as you English call it. I have won the trick."

"Yes, you have won the trick," assented Chumbley; "but you don't hold the honours," he added to himself.

"I am glad that you are wise," she said, smiling now. "I will go, and my people shall bring you dinner."

"Thanks," said Chumbley; "that is the kindest act you can do to us now; only please forget the poison."

"Poison!" she cried, indignantly. "How dare you say that to me! You are prisoners here, but you are quite safe while you do not try to escape. Have I done so little to make myself an Englishwoman that you talk of poison?"

"Yes," said Chumbley to himself, "so little to make yourself an Englishwoman that you play upon us such a trick as this!"

The door opened, the Inche Maida passed through; and as the curtain fell down again and covered the opening, Hilton turned angrily upon his friend.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Four.

A Night of Terror.

It was night before Helen again woke, and her first thought was of escape; but as she softly rose to a sitting posture, she felt that one of the girls was by her side, and as she listened to her regular breathing, and tried in the darkness to collect her thoughts and to recall exactly where the door and window lay, the black night seemed a little less black just in one particular part of the room, and she realised that the window must lie there.

"If I could get past that window!" thought Helen, with throbbing brain. "I know it would be hard, but still I might make my way to the river and find someone who would be my friend. There must be paths through the jungle."

Then with a strange aching sense of misery she thought of how little she had done since she had been out there. No one could be more ignorant of the nature of the jungle than she. She remembered that someone had called it impenetrable; but she knew that Dr Bolter went on expeditions to discover gold, and that the Reverend Arthur Rosebury sometimes wandered there.

"Poor Mr Rosebury?" she said, half aloud. "What he could do sorely I could," and then the blood in her veins seemed to freeze, and a shudder ran through her, for from out of the darkness came a deep, hoarse, snarling roar that she recognised at once as that of some tiger on the prowl.

She was very ignorant of the jungle and its dangers, but she knew that if she should attempt to leave the building where she was imprisoned now, the result would be that she would encounter a foe of whose savage nature the station was full of tales.

The stories of her childhood came back to her then, and she laughed bitterly as she recalled the faith she had once had in the legend of Una and the lion, and familiar histories of how the helpless had been befriended by the savage creatures of the forest. Then, as she thought of her defenceless state, she once more shuddered, and asked herself whether it would not be better to trust herself to the jungle than stay where she was, to encounter one whom she dreaded far more than the creature whose cry she had just heard.

In a fit of desperate energy as her thoughts were fixed upon Murad and the possibility that he might at any time now present himself, Helen softly glided from her couch and began to cross the uneven floor, stepping cautiously from bamboo lath to lath, and shivering as one gave a crack from time to time.

It seemed darker now, and for guide towards the window there was nothing but the faintly-felt sensation of the dank jungle air coming cool against her cheek; but she kept on, thinking nothing of the way she should turn or how she should escape; all that animated her now was the one great idea that she must steal away beyond the power of these two Malay women to recall her. If she could now do that, the rest might prove easy. Something would no doubt offer itself.

"I must, I will escape," she half wailed, in a whisper that startled her as it fell upon her ear, so full was it of helpless misery and despair.

She paused to listen, for one of the girls had moved, and then, as she stood in the darkness, there was a very faint rustling noise, and Helen felt that her gaoler had risen and was cautiously stealing towards her. So sure was she of this, that she held up one hand to keep her enemy at a distance; but though the sound continued, no one touched her, and the soft rustling came no nearer to where she stood.

She uttered a sigh of misery at her own dread and overwrought imagination, as she now realised the fact that the soft rustling was that of leaves as the night wind stirred them when it passed, for the soft, heavy breathing of the sleepers came regularly to her ear.

It was very strange and confusing, though, for now in that intense darkness she seemed to have lost herself, and she could not tell exactly from which side the heavy breathing came.

Once, as she listened intently, it seemed to grow so loud that it struck her it was the breathing of some monster of the jungle that had stopped by the open window; but soon she recovered herself sufficiently to feel that she was wrong; it was but the regular sleep of her companions, and laying her hand upon her breast to stay the throbbings of her heart, she gathered up the loose sarong that interfered with her progress, and stepped on cautiously towards where she believed the door to be.

Once more the yielding bamboos bent beneath her weight, creaking loudly, and as they cracked at every step the more loudly now that she was walking beyond the rugs, the sounds were so plain in the still night that she tremblingly wondered why her companions did not wake.

At last one gave so loud a crack that she stood perfectly still, afraid to either advance or recede; but to her great comfort the regular breathing of the two Malay girls rose and fell, as it were, like the pulses of the intensely hot night.

With the feeling that any attempt at haste must result in failure, Helen stood there listening as the low hum of the night-flying insects reached her ear; and somehow, in spite of the peril in which she stood, thoughts of the past came back, and the hot-breathed gloom seemed to suggest those summer nights at the Miss Twettenham's when the sun-scorched air lingered in the dormitories, and they used to sit by the open windows, enjoying the sweetness of the soft night, reluctant to go to bed. Those were the times when, filled with romantic thoughts, they listened to the nightingales answering each challenge from copse to copse, and making the listeners think of subjects the Misses Twettenham never taught—subjects relating to love, with serenades, cavaliers, elopements, and other horrors, such as would have made the thin hair of those amiable elderly ladies stand on end. For there was something *very* witching in those soft summer nights, an atmosphere that set young hearts dream of romantic futures. Helen Perowne had perhaps had the wildest imagination of any dreamer there, but in her most exalted times she had never dreamed so wild a life-romance as that of which she had become the heroine; and as she stood there with her throat parched, listening to the hum of mosquitoes and the breathing of her companions, everything seemed so unreal that she was ready to ask herself whether she slept—whether she did not dream still—and would awake to find herself back in the conventual seclusion of the old school.

Then once more came the shudder-engendering roar of the prowling tiger, apparently close at hand, and in its deep, strange tones seeming to make the building vibrate.

Helen shivered, and the cold, damp perspiration gathered on her face, as she felt now the propinquity of the tiger to such an extent that she was ready to sink down helpless upon the floor.

There it was again—that low, deep, muttering roar, ending in a growling snarl, and so close below the window that she trembled, knowing as she did that there were only a few frail bamboo laths between her and the most savage creature that roamed the jungle.

Was it real, she asked herself once more, that she, Helen Perowne, was here in this wild forest, surrounded by beasts of prey, and none of her friends at hand; or had she lost her senses, and would she awaken some day calm and cool at home, with a faint, misty recollection of having suffered from some fever that had attacked her brain.

Yes, it was real; she was alone and helpless in that terrible place, and there, in the pulsating furnace-like heat of the dark night, was the cry of the tiger once again.

There was no doubt of its being one of these huge catlike creatures, for she had heard it frequently by night in the neighbourhood of the settlement, where during the past few years more than one unfortunate Chinese servant had been carried off. But when she had listened to the low, muttered, guttural roar, ending in an angry snarl, she had been at the window of her own home, surrounded by protectors; and awesome as the sound had seemed, it had never inspired her with such dread as now when she had determined to risk everything in her attempt to escape, and expose herself to the tender mercies of such creatures as this now wandering about the place.

Again and again came the cry, now seemingly distant, now close at hand, till at last Helen's knees refused to support her, and she sank down trembling, for the creature's breathing could be plainly heard beneath where she stood, the lightly-built house being, like all in the Malay jungle, raised upon stout bamboo or palm posts for protection from wild beasts and flood.

Singularly enough, as the first horror passed away, Helen felt her courage return.

"It will not hurt me," she said, hysterically; but she crouched there trembling as she listened to the snuffling noise beneath her, and then there was a dull thud as of a heavy leap.

Helen shuddered as she listened, and by some strange mental process began to compare the feline monster, excited by the scent of human beings close at hand, to Murad; and after listening till all seemed still once more—till the muffled cry of the tiger arose now some distance away, she rose cautiously, and made her way towards the door.

A kind of nervous energy had seized upon her now, and she stepped forward lightly to touch the woven walls.

Sweeping her hand over them, she recognised her position now by the hangings, and the darkness-engendered confusion to some extent passed away. She found the door, and the great curtain rustled as she drew it aside to get at the fastening, her hands feeling wet and cold, while her face was burning, and her heart kept up a heavy, dull beat.

There was a faint sound apparently from behind her now, and she stood listening, but it was not repeated. The low hum of the nocturnal insects rose and fell, and once more the soft rustling of the leaves stirred by the night wind came through the window close at hand, and from very far off now, and so faint as to be hardly perceptible, there was the tiger's growl. There was nothing more but the heat, which seemed in its intensity to throb and beat upon her brain.

But still Helen dared not move for a time, trembling the while lest the first touch she gave the door should awaken her gaolers. At last, though, she nerved herself once more, and tried to find out how the door was fastened. There was no lock, no bolt, such as those to which she was accustomed, and though she passed her hands over it in every direction it was without result.

The time was gliding on, and in her ignorance of how long she might have slept, she felt that morning would at any time be there; so with a weary sigh of misery she left her futile task and crept cautiously to the window.

It did not seem so dark now, or else her eyes were more accustomed to the want of light, for she found the window directly; and as she took hold of the bamboo bars, the hot night air came in a heavy puff against her face, fierce and glowing, as if it were some watching monster's breath.

She listened as she stood there, and the breathing of the two girls seemed to have ceased. There was the tiger's cry once more, but sounding now like a distant wail, and her spirits rose as she felt that one of the perils likely to assail her was passing away.

Again she listened, and once more the breathing of her companions reached her ear, the Malay girls seeming to be sleeping heavily, as with nervous fingers Helen now strove to move one of the bars, or to loosen it so that it could be thrust up or down, but without avail; then she strove to draw one of them sufficiently aside to allow her to pass through, but her efforts were entirely in vain, although she kept on striving, in total ignorance of the fact that it would have taken a strong man armed with an axe to have done the work she adventured with her tender fingers alone.

Just as she let her aching arms fall to her side and a weary sigh of disappointment escaped her breast, she felt herself caught tightly by the wrist, and with a sensation of horror so great as to threaten the overthrow of her reason, she snatched herself away, and clung to the bars of the window with all her remaining strength.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Five.

A Desperate Appeal.

It was some few moments after she had been seized again, and this time held by two hands stronger than her own, that Helen Perowne realised the fact that it was the Malay girl that had shown her the most compassion who had taken her by the arm.

"What are you doing here?" was whispered in a low, angry voice.

Helen made no reply, and as she clung to the window, the girl went on:

"You were trying to get away, but it is of no use. Murad knew that when they brought you here. If you could get out of this place you could not go far through the jungle before the tigers would tear you down. No one kills them here. He has them kept that he may hunt them; but when the time for hunting them comes, Murad is away with the English people, or he is not well, or he has no elephants, so the tigers are never touched. They would tear you down, I say, and when Murad's men searched for you, they would only find your bones. I remember two girls escaping to the jungle, but they were both killed."

"Better that than stay here," said Helen, in a low, excited voice. "Listen to me," she continued, striving hard to make herself understood; "you do not like me—you do not want me here."

"No!" said the girl, fiercely. "I wish you had not come—that you would go and be killed; but if you were to escape, Murad would kill us all; and I do not want to die—no—not yet."

"No, no; he would not be so cruel," whispered Helen, who trembled with hope and excitement, as she felt that a chance for escape had at last come. "Help me to get away—to get back to my friends!" she cried, appealingly. "Let me escape, and I will reward you—I will give you what you like. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I know what you say," replied the girl, "but I do not believe it. You are the English lady who made the Rajah love you because he was so handsome. We know all here; and now that he has brought you, what is this you tell me—that you want to go away? Oh, no! it is like a little child. I do not believe one word!"

"But it is true!" whispered Helen. "Speak lower, or you will waken her," said the girl; "and she hates you more than I!"

"I will obey you in anything," whispered Helen, restraining her voice, and sinking down and clutching the girl's knees, "only help me to escape, and my father will fill your hands with gold."

"What use would it be to me?" said the girl with a quiet little laugh.

"I will give you anything you ask!" panted Helen excitedly, as she seemed to see a faint chance of the girl yielding.

"Do you not understand what would happen if I helped you to go?" said the girl, quietly.

"No; I cannot tell," replied Helen, "but I will not mind the danger."

"There is more danger for me than for you," was the answer, with a little laugh. "I will tell you: Murad would be angry and fierce; he would forget that he loved me once, and brought me here to be one of his wives. He would make his men take me to the river, and force me to kneel down, when I should be krissed and thrown into the water for the crocodiles to eat."

"Oh, no; it is too horrible!" whispered Helen, as her excited imagination conjured up the dreadful scene.

"It is true," said the girl, simply. "He had one wife krissed like that because she ran away twice—because she ran away to the boy she loved before she was taken from her home. Murad is Sultan, and he will be obeyed. He is very cruel sometimes!"

Helen shuddered as she thought that if this were true, she could not ask for help at such a price.

"I should have gone away before now," said the girl, thoughtfully, as her hands played with Helen's hair; "for I have someone else who followed me here that he might be near me; but I dare not go! Murad would kill me. It would not hurt much, and I don't think I should mind; but he would kill someone else, and I could not bear that!"

"Go, then," said Helen quickly. "Leave me to myself. Let me escape without your help!"

"He would kill me and her all the same," said the girl, sadly; "and if I let you get out, what could you do? You would wander in the jungle till the beasts seized you, or you died. You must have a boat to escape from here; and if you could get a boat you could not row."

"I would escape along the jungle-paths," whispered Helen, excitedly.

"No," said the girl, "you could not do that. There is only one path through the jungle, and that goes from this house to the river. That is all. You cannot escape; why do you try?"

Helen rose from her knees, and clutched the girl's arms fiercely.

"I can escape, and I will!" she panted excitedly. "How dare he seize an English lady and insult her like this!"

"Because he is Sultan here, and he is stronger and greater than we are," said the girl. "Murad is a mighty prince, and all the people here are his slaves and have to obey. You must obey him too."

"I!" cried Helen.

"Yes, you; and you will be happy, for he loves you more than all. He used to come from Sindang here, and talk to us, and praise you, and tell us that you would come and be our mistress here. He loves you very much, and you will be quite happy soon."

"Happy? With him?" cried Helen, in horror.

"Yes, happy. You have won his love from us, and we here are only like your slaves. It is you who take away our happiness, and I ought to hate you; but I do not, for you are so young. Do you love someone else?"

"Yes—no, no!" panted Helen, excitedly.

"But you love Murad?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Helen.

"I am sorry—I am sorry," said the girl, thoughtfully.

"Then help me—pray help me!" whispered Helen, prayerfully, and she flung her arms round the swarthy girl, and held her to her breast. "Help me to get away, for I do not love Murad, and you do!"

The girl started and thrust Helen away, but only to cling to her in turn after a moment's pause.

"Yes, I think I love him," she said, softly, "though he is very cruel to me now."

"And you hate me—very much—because—because Murad loves me?" whispered Helen, with a shudder.

"I don't think I hate you very much," said the girl, softly.

"You need not hate me—indeed you need not!" whispered Helen, and her voice, her very ways were changed now. The old pride was entirely gone, and she spoke with winning, womanly sweetness, full of tenderness and caress, as she nestled closer and closer to the girl. "You need not hate me," she repeated, "for I detest this Murad—I loathe him! I love some one else! Help me, then, to get back to my own people—to escape from Murad. Help me, or I shall die!"

The girl was silent.

"Oh," moaned Helen, "she does not understand anything I say!"

"Yes," said the girl, softly, "I understand."

"Then you pretended you could not!" cried Helen, wrathfully.

"Murad ordered me to pretend that I only knew my own tongue," said the girl. "But no, I cannot help you, and you will not die. I thought so once; but we do not die because we are taken from our homes and people. Murad makes us love him, and then we forget the past, for we know that it is our fate."

Helen's heart sank as she listened to the girl's words, so full of patient resignation, and she wondered whether she would ever be like this. There was not a ray of hope now in her utterances, and for the moment, in the horror of the despair that came upon her, she felt frantic.

Thrusting her companion from her, she made a dash for the entrance, beating and tearing at it in her madness, as she uttered a series of loud hysteric cries. She shook the door fiercely, but her efforts were in vain; and as she strove to reach the window her fit of excitement seemed to pass, leaving her weak and despairing, heart-sick too, as she felt

how lowering her acts must be in the sight of her companions; for the second girl had now sprung up, and she felt herself dragged back to her couch, and there compelled to stay.

They both joined in scolding her angrily; and feeling her helplessness, a strange feeling of weakness came over the prisoner, and she lay there at last a prey to despair, as she realised now more fully how slight was her prospect of escape—how much slighter was the chance of Neil Harley coming to her help, however earnestly he might have searched.

Before morning, when her companions had once more sunk to sleep, in spite of the hope that she felt of perhaps after all winning one of them to her side, so terribly had her misery of feeling increased, that as she pondered on her state, she found herself praying that Neil Harley might never look upon her face again.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Six.

Escaped by Accident.

The Rev. Arthur Rosebury passed many miserable hours when the sun was down, for then he began to think of Helen Perowne, and wondered where she was. It was a terrible thought that she was in the power of the Malays; and in a dreamy, despairing manner, he wondered how matters were at the station, and whether any steps would be taken to set him at liberty.

But as soon as the daylight came there was solace for the solitary prisoner, for he was amongst wonderful plants, such as he had never before seen, and his guards or attendants, whichever they might be called, were always ready to help him, and to supply him with any specimens he required.

He had lost count of time by devoting himself so earnestly to the botanical treasures of the garden; and one morning, after asking himself whether he ought not to make some effort to escape, he was out in the grounds of his prison-house once more, when, having pretty well exhausted its treasures, he walked straight to the gate.

His guard, who had been seated beneath the veranda calmly chewing his betel-nut, snatched out his kris, and darted fiercely after the chaplain, who was evidently about to escape; but on coming in sight of the prisoner, and finding him stooping over a cluster of orchids in a damp place in the jungle, the man stopped short, a contemptuous smile crossed his face, and he slowly replaced his kris, folded his arms and leaned against a tree.

In his eyes the botanist was a simple maniac, and so long as he made no vigorous effort to escape, it did not seem to matter if he went a little way into the jungle to collect his plants.

Stepping back quietly a few yards, the man held up his hands in a peculiar way, and a couple of dark figures armed with spears, glided from the house to his side, the little party crouching down amongst the dense growth, and holding a consultation for a few minutes, the result of which was that the two last arrivals glided back a short distance, while the principal guard slowly followed the chaplain some twenty or thirty yards behind, and always unseen by him he watched. The foliage was so dense that there was never the slightest difficulty in this, and hence it was that as the Reverend Arthur, forgetful now of everything but his favourite pursuit, went slowly on into the more easily penetrated parts of the jungle, his guards were always close at hand, forming as it were the links of a chain between his prison and himself.

At intervals he would perhaps stop and think of Helen, wondering where she was, and whether he ought not to make some strenuous effort to find her; but as often as not, in the midst of these thoughts, he would catch sight of some fresh flower or woodland moss, objects that he had worshipped long before Helen Perowne had disturbed the tranquillity of his peaceful life, and then he would eagerly stoop down to pick it, most likely ending by kneeling in some wet place, while he fixed a powerful lens in his eye, examined the plant carefully, and stopped to think. Then most likely he would pick some huge leaf to lay upon the ground, and with that as tray to hold the various portions of his specimen, he would take out a penknife, and proceed to dissect the plant, examining its various parts with the greatest care before making the most rigid notes, and then consigning his treasure to the basket he had brought with him.

This went on day after day, till he got into the habit of going off directly after his morning meal, and penetrating some distance along some narrow jungle path, generally losing himself completely at last, and pausing to stare about him, hungry, faint, and bewildered.

It was always the same; after staring about him for a few minutes, wondering what he should do, and feeling oppressed by the vastness and silence of the jungle, he would catch sight of a tall dark figure, standing some little distance off, leaning upon a spear, and go to it for help.

The quiet helplessness of the prisoner seemed to win his guards over to him; and as day after day glided slowly by, and he showed not the slightest disposition to make an attempt at escape, he was allowed more latitude by the Malays and travelled farther and farther from the place that had been made his prison.

It was only natural under the circumstances, that, with the cord that metaphorically held him so much relaxed, it would grow weaker and weaker, and so it proved. In fact, had the chaplain been as other men were, he would have had but little difficulty in making his escape. But after thinking deeply of the possibilities of getting away, the Reverend Arthur concluded that not only was it next to impossible, but that, situated as he was, it was his duty to stay where he was, especially as he believed himself to be near Helen, who was also a captive, and whom, sooner or later, he would be called upon to help and protect. He had, too, a half-formed, nebulous idea that it would be better to leave matters to fate, for in his helpless state he could do nothing; and then one day he began to think that his

wanderings about the jungle might prove beneficial in giving him a knowledge of the country, and on the day in question this idea had come upon him strongly.

He actually reproached himself for being so supine, and went off uninterrupted for some distance, growing more and more animated as he went, and telling himself that he felt sure Helen Perowne was somewhere near, and that he must strive to find her.

The result was that he walked laboriously on for miles, till he was hot, weary, and exhausted; and then seating himself upon the trunk of a huge palm, which being situated in a more open place than usual, had been blown down by some furious gale, he began to wipe the drenching perspiration from his face, sighed deeply, and then saw clustering close by his feet a magnificent group of orchids of a species that was quite new.

The Reverend Arthur Rosebury had gone on well into middle life without so much as dreaming of love, and then he had seen Helen Perowne, and his love for her had not prospered. Still it had burned on steadily and brightly month after month, and only wanting a little fostering care upon the lady's part to make it burst forth into a brilliant flame; but somehow his old pursuits retained an enormous power over his spirit, and although upon this particular day he had come out determined to make some effort—what he hardly knew, but still to make some effort—he was turned at once from his project by the flowers at his feet; and that day Helen's face troubled him no more.

Heat, hunger, and weariness were all forgotten, and he did not even look round to see if either of his guards was there, though all the same the principal of them had for the last hour been following him with lowering looks. Quite out of patience, and hot and exhausted in his turn, he was about to close up, take the chaplain by the arm, and lead him back, when he saw him seat himself, and soon after stoop down and begin to pick the plants, digging some of them up completely by the roots, and spreading them before him for a long investigation.

The Malay smiled with satisfaction, and the lowering, angry look left his face. He, too, found a resting-place, took out his eternal betel-box, and prepared his piece of nut, chewing away contentedly, like some ruminating animal, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the Reverend Arthur as he busied himself with his plants, cutting, laying open, and making notes. As in the distance the Malay saw the chaplain's pencil going, he slowly sank back into a more comfortable position; then his eyes began to open and shut, and open and shut, and then forget to open, so that by the time the prisoner had begun to gather up his specimens, a happy smile of content upon his lip, the guard was lying right back, hidden amongst the dense growth, sleeping heavily, and half-covered by different kinds of insects which were investigating the nature of the strange being that had taken possession of their domain.

The time passed, and then the chaplain rose refreshed by his long rest, looked round to see which way he had come, and after satisfying himself that he was quite right, went off in a direction that, for taking him back to whence he came, was quite wrong.

It did not trouble him though in the least, for his mind was intent upon the plants he passed; and so accustomed was he to giving up his thoughts entirely to such pursuits as this, that he was quite lost to everything else, and he went slowly on, finding himself in a more open portion of the jungle, and surrounded on all sides by new plants.

It was a perfect paradise to him, and he did not feel the want of an Eve, but culled the specimens here and there, careless of the fact that there was no path where he was, no trace of human beings having been there before, but there were choice specimens in abundance, and that was enough for him.

Once only did his thoughts go back to his friends, and that was when with much difficulty he had forced his way through some dense thorns with unfortunate results to his clothes.

"I am afraid that Mary would be rather angry," he muttered, "if she saw me now. Poor Mary! how happy she seems with the doctor; but she is just a little too strict sometimes."

Thinking about his sister, he went on in the most abstracted manner, the thoughts of his sister bringing up Helen Perowne, and he went on talking to himself half aloud, while a flock of parroquets in the trees above his head kept travelling on with him, flitting from branch to branch, climbing by foot and beak, hanging by one leg, heads up and heads down, and always seeming to watch him, and be mocking and gibing at him like a set of green and scarlet feathered implings who made derisive gestures, while they were astounded at the sight of an English clergyman journeying through that savage place.

"I'm afraid dear Mary would not like it," he said, simply, "even if finally Helen were to give me her consent. And yet dear Mary would never be able to resist so much beauty as Helen possesses. I wonder where she is now?"

He sighed deeply, and then paused to consider the beauty of a lovely acacia with its graceful pinnate leaves. Then came a hard struggle through a dense cane-break which left him hot and panting.

"It's much pleasanter travelling through the English woods," he said. "The heat here is very trying, and I'm getting faint and hungry. I'm afraid I've lost my way."

He looked about for some little time, but saw nothing till he had dragged his weary legs on for about another half-mile, when the appearance of the ground told him that people had not long since passed that way.

"Then I shall find a village," he said, "and the people will give or sell me something, and—Bless me, how strange!"

He stopped short and listened, but all was still but the chattering and whistling of the birds.

"It must have been one of the parrots," he said, "but it sounded remarkably like a woman's voice. It is an unaccountable thing to me how it is that nature should have given the parrot family so remarkable a power of

imitating the human voice. Now, as I walked along there I could have been sure that a woman had called to me aloud for help. It sounded very peculiar in this wild jungle, echoing and strange, and it seemed to startle me."

There was a regular chorus of whistling and chattering just now, and the chaplain started, for there came directly after a loud whirring of wings; the air seemed full of flashes of green, and blue, and scarlet, and then the stillness was almost painful.

"How easily one may be deceived!" he said, quietly. "One notices such things more when one is tired and hungry; and it is very dull work to be alone out here. I wish Bolter could be my companion and—there it was again."

The chaplain stopped short and listened, for a wild cry certainly rang out now; and, willing as he was to attribute the strange noise to a bird, it seemed impossible that it could have proceeded from one of them.

"If it is a cry," the chaplain said, hastily, "I must be very near to a village, and someone is in trouble."

The idea of help being needed roused him so that he hurried on, and kept thrusting back the hanging and running canes which impeded his way, till at the end of a few minutes he came suddenly upon an open space surrounded by trees, with evidently a broad track, leading away towards what, from the difference in the growth of the foliage, must be a stream.

Away to the right he could see the gable-end of what was apparently a large palm-thatched house, and over it there was a group of magnificent cocoa-palms, such as at another time would have secured his attention; but now different feelings were awakened, for from out of a low clump of trees he suddenly saw a Malay woman come running, her gay silken sarong and scarf fluttering in the breeze.

She saw him evidently, and made signs to him, which, instead of attracting him to her side, made him shrink away.

"It is some quarrel among themselves," he muttered, for he recalled the advice he had heard given him as to his behaviour to the people, and the danger of interfering with their home lives.

As he thought this, he stopped, and was about to turn away, when a fresh cry smote his ear, and the woman ran a few paces towards him, tottered as she caught her foot in a trailing cane, and fell heavily to the ground.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Seven.

A Desperate Attempt.

More long weary days of stifling heat, without a breath of air to relieve the oppression, and more hot suffocating nights, during which, half wild with terror and despair, Helen, like some newly-captured bird, had beaten the bars of her prison in vain.

She had appealed to the Malay girl, but only for her to turn away and seem at last weary and troubled by the importunity she had received. Then she had appealed to the second girl, who was of a morose jealous aspect, and who evidently detested her. But all appeal here was vain, for the girl evidently did not understand her words, and turned sullenly away. It was so, too, with the rest of the women, who came to the door and just entered the room in obedience to some call.

But Helen might as well have appealed to the trees that stood tall and columnar just outside the prison window. Those who did not understand her words looked at her with a heavy scowl; while those who could comprehend laughed, or made her keep away from them, for they disliked her coming, and their eyes plainly told the hatred that there was in their hearts. Beside which, they knew the punishment that would fall to their lot should they go in opposition to their lord's orders, and the danger was too great to tempt the most willing of them to run any risks.

The girl who had been most gentle to her, and who had not scrupled to talk freely about her own affairs, now seemed to keep aloof; and feeling more and more her helplessness, Helen awoke to the fact that if she were to escape from her present durance it must be by her own effort.

In this spirit she tried to restrain herself, and waited patiently for some opportunity for communicating with her friends; though when this opportunity would come she was obliged to confess was doubtful in the extreme.

Naturally enough her thoughts turned to writing, and feeling the folly of applying in a place like her prison for pens and paper, she set herself to contrive some means upon which she could describe her position, finding it at last in the form of a book, one of whose fly-leaves she covered with a pitiful appeal to any Englishman who would read it, and imploring help. This she kept by her, ready to send should opportunity occur, and still the dreary days glided by.

There was one redeeming point, though, in her captivity, and that was the fact that so far she had not been troubled by a visit from Murad; but at last one morning, when the fresh beauty of the scene outside her window and the elasticity of the brisk air made her feel more cheerful than of old, she awoke to the fact that there was a little stir about the place; the women calling to each other and seeming busier than was their wont. The two girls who acted as Helen's gaolers ran to the glass as soon as they entered, and with all the coquetry of some London belle in her first season, placed wreaths of white flowers in their braids, twisted their sarongs into more graceful folds, and then turned their attention to Helen.

She refused to allow them to approach her at first, but her resistance was useless, and finding that without violence there were no means of overcoming their tolerably good-humoured pertinacity, she submitted, wearily telling them to do what they pleased, when one, the most friendly, insisted upon taking down her magnificent hair.

"Only to make it more beautiful," she said.

At this moment the other woman left the room.

"Will you help me to escape?" said Helen, quickly, as soon as they were alone.

"No; I dare not. Murad would have me killed."

"Then will you send this paper by a messenger down to the station?"

"Paper?" said the girl, wonderingly.

"Yes, paper. I have written for help; send it by a messenger. Here are my rings and watch to pay him for going. Take them, and if you have any womanly feeling, help me now."

"I cannot; I dare not," whispered the woman; but Helen forced paper and trinkets into her hand, just as the second attendant was heard coming, when her companion burst out into one of the minor songs of the country, and busied herself with her task.

Helen's heart gave one great throb of hope, and raising her eyes to those of her attendant, she read there that her message would be sent.

The second woman brought in a bunch of what seemed to be a kind of waxy yellow jasmine of an extremely powerful odour. These she proceeded to twine in and amongst Helen's magnificent dark hair; and when the prisoner shudderingly attempted to resist, feeling as she did that she was being decked out for, as it were, a sacrifice, the flower-bearer stormed at her angrily in the Malay tongue, and seemed to threaten her with some severe punishment if she persisted in tearing them out.

"It would be childish to keep on opposing them," thought Helen, whose spirits were lighter now that she had found some means, as she hoped, of communicating with the station; and she resigned herself to her attendant's clever hands.

As she sat back, listening languidly to the whistling, chattering noise of the parroquets that swarmed in the jungle, she felt a pang shoot through her, for very faintly heard there was a sound familiar to her ear—a sound that she had frequently listened to at her open window at the station. It was the plashing of oars coming from a distance, and she felt that at last the Rajah was approaching the place, to see his prisoner.

Helen's teeth gritted together as she set them hard, calling upon herself for all her fortitude and strength of mind for what she knew must be a terrible ordeal.

The scene at home on that morning when Murad had come to propose for her hand came back most vividly, and for the moment she trembled as she realised the evil she had done.

She recovered herself though somewhat, and striving hard to be prepared for what was to come, sat listening and wondering whether Murad really was close at hand.

She had not long to wait in indecision, and she knew that her hearing had not played her false, for the two girls had heard the same sound, and running to the window, stood listening as the splash of oars now came nearer and nearer.

Then the sounds ceased, and there was to Helen a painful silence. The heat grew oppressive, and the leaves hung motionless in the glowing air. For the moment it seemed like one of the oppressive July days in her old school; but the fancy was gone directly after, and the horrors of her position came back so strongly that she could hardly refrain from running wildly about the room and crying for help.

Just then the two girls left the window, and crossed to where Helen was seated, darting at her, as it seemed in her then excited condition, furious and angrily envious looks before turning now to the doorway, passing through, and letting the great curtain fall behind.

As Helen waited her heart began to beat violently, for there was no mistaking the import of the sounds she heard. So far they had been women's voices, now unmistakably they were men's; and growing more and more agitated, and ready to start at every sound, she sat waiting for the interview that she knew must come.

To her surprise the day glided on till the afternoon was well advanced, and still, beyond the occasional sound of male voices, there was nothing to distinguish between this day and any other, save that once, when left alone together, the Malay girl whispered to her:

"I have sent a messenger with your paper, but he may never take it where you wish."

Before Helen could declare her thankfulness the girl was gone, giving place to the other, who looked at her morosely, and then stood leaning by the door till a loud voice called her, and she answered, going out quickly, while Helen sat trembling and pressing her hand upon her palpitating heart.

Could it be true? and if true, were there not attendants waiting to guard the entrance, for unmistakably it seemed that the Malay girl had hurried to obey the call and left the door open.

Helen rose, and walked with tottering step to the door, to find that not only was it open, but that there was no one in the room beyond—a room whose door opened straight upon a kind of bamboo veranda, with a flight of steps down to the ground; while beyond that was a clearing, and then the jungle.

She paused for a minute listening. There was not a sound but the loud whistling and chattering of the birds in the trees. The place might have been deserted, everything was so still; and it did not occur to her that this was a time when many of the people would be asleep till the heat of the day was past.

It was enough for her that the way to freedom was there; and hesitating no longer, she passed out into the farther room, reached the door unseen, and was in the act of descending the flight of steps, when one of the Malay women of the place saw and ran at her, catching her by the dress and arm, and holding her so tenaciously, that Helen, in her anguish at being thus checked, uttered a cry for help, escaped her retainer, and then leaped down and ran.

The Malay woman was joined by another now; and in her excitement and ignorance of which way to go, she was driven into a corner, but only to make a brave dash for liberty as the girls caught and held her again.

In her excitement Helen cried again and again for help, forgetful of the fact that she was more likely to summon enemies than friends.

The cries of a woman had little effect there, for beyond bringing out a couple more of the Malay women, Helen's appeals for help seemed to create no excitement; and she was beginning to feel that her efforts would prove in vain, when she saw a figure come from amongst the trees, and stretching out her hands towards it, she made one last effort to reach what she had looked upon as safety.

For there could be no mistaking that figure. It was the chaplain. At the moment it seemed to her that Arthur Rosebury had been sent there expressly to save her from her terrible position; and half-fainting, panting, and thoroughly exhausted, she tottered on, tripped, and fell.

The effort to escape was vain, for a couple of Malay women seized Helen's arms and dragged her off, followed by the chaplain, but not for many yards. Before he had gone far he too was seized, and hurried back in the way by which he had come. It was vain to struggle, and he had to resign himself, but it was with feelings mingled with indignation and disgust.

The Malay lady was evidently of superior station by her dress; and that she was ill-used there could be no doubt. His English blood glowed at the thought, and clergyman though he was, and man of peace, he still felt enough spirit to be ready to have undertaken her defence.

He cooled down, though, as he was hurried back through the jungle—cooled in temper, but heated in body; while the faintness and hunger soon increased to such an extent that his adventure with the Malay lady was forgotten.

But not by Helen Perowne, who, once more shut up in her room, rejoiced to think that, though surrounded by enemies, there was one friend near—a true friend whom she could trust—one who would be ready to do anything for her sake, badly as she had behaved to him.

"He cannot be far away," she said, half aloud, and with the hysterical sobs in her throat. "He is near, and there must be friends with him. He saw me, and he will not lose a minute without bringing help; and then—"

And then she stopped as if paralysed, for the thought came upon her with a flash that, though the Reverend Arthur Rosebury had seen her, he had only gazed upon a tall, swarthy Malay woman, in whom he could not possibly have recognised Helen Perowne.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Eight.

Murad at Home.

The place was very still once more as Helen sat thinking, with her two attendants idling by the window. She had heard the sound of oars, and there had been men's voices, but nothing more.

She was angry with herself for the ill success of her attempt to escape; but by degrees she calmed down, and her excitement passed off, for there was something inexpressibly comforting in the knowledge that the chaplain was not far away. She succeeded so well at last in recovering her equanimity that she told herself she was ready to crush Murad with the outburst of righteous indignation that would flow from her lips.

There was a calm, dreamy feeling about the place now, and her attendants seemed half asleep. It was intensely hot, and the birds and insects had ceased their whistlings and busy hum. So quiet did it seem in the late afternoon that everything might have been supposed asleep, when once more the sound of voices sent a thrill through Helen, and she began to tremble and feel weak once more, till suddenly there was one voice heard above the others, giving orders, and this voice sent a thrill through her—not of dread, but of anger.

She drew herself up, for the time had come, and, like one who has been for weeks dreading some painful scene, shrinking within herself, but grows brave and ready at the last moment when she is face to face with the difficulty, so Helen Perowne suddenly felt herself firm and ready for the encounter she had to endure.

It was Murad's voice undoubtedly, giving orders in a sharp, commanding way; and though he spoke in the Malay tongue, she readily recognised the tones that had been used at the station, when he had hung over her ottoman, softened his words to the occasion, and then gazed at her with love-softened eyes.

"Idiot! idiot! weak coquette that I was!" she cried to herself. "Had I no more sense than to lead this savage on for the sake of gaining a little more adoration. Oh! father, it was a curse you gave me, and not a blessing, in those handsome features that all people praised."

The weak tears rose to her eyes, and it was only by an effort that she kept them back, clenching her teeth and fingers, and striving to be firm.

"It is too late now," she muttered then. "Oh! Grey Stuart, would to Heaven that you were here!"

Then, with forced composure upon her face and her heart palpitating wildly, she took up one of the Chinese fans that lay by her ottoman, and sat listening as she plainly heard steps ascending the broad ladder to the platform. Then, with her heart beating in unison to the footsteps that came across the adjoining room, she waited till the door was thrown open; the great curtain was hastily drawn aside by the two Malay attendants, who both stood with head reverently bowed and eyes cast down, as if they dared not gaze upon their lord, while Murad entered with a quick imperious step, and stood there, in his semi-European costume.

He gazed sharply from one to the other for a moment or two, and then made an imperious gesture, signing to the two girls to leave the room.

Helen did not move, but sat with her head raised, her eyelids drooped, but watchfully noting everything that went on. She forced down her terrible emotion, and moment by moment gained greater command over herself.

The two girls looked up at their lord appealingly for a moment, but there was so fierce a look directed at them that they crossed their hands deprecatingly upon their breasts, bent their heads, and with their eyes upon the bamboo flooring, passed slowly out.

The time had come. Helen had determined to be brave and to resume her mastery over this savage prince; but in spite of her efforts to be calm, her timid woman's nature prevailed, and found vent in a quick, short command to the girls.

"No, no," she cried. "Stay!"

But as she uttered her order they were passing through, the door shut heavily behind them, and the Rajah let the heavy curtain fall back in its place.

Then she felt that she was alone indeed, and for a moment her head swam as she gazed through her long dark lashes at the daring Malay who was the author of this outrage and its cruel sequence.

He was still by the door, standing erect and proud, his head drawn back, one hand resting upon the hilt of his kris, and a mocking smile of triumph upon his face, as if he were rejoicing at the success of his plans.

"You do not rise to welcome me," he whispered softly. "Are you angry because I have been so long away?"

She did not answer, but nerved herself more and more, and to her great joy she felt that it was anger rather than fear that now filled her breast, though she told herself that perhaps diplomacy might be more successful than threats.

"It is because I have stayed so long," he said, half mockingly; and then, speaking once more in his low, passionate tones—the tones Helen had thought so musical in the drawing-room of their home at the station—he whispered:

"I could not have hoped for so great a change. You are a thousand times more beautiful than you were before."

Helen essayed to speak, but her emotion choked her utterance; and always watchful of his slightest movement, she still sat with her eyelids drooping, and he went on in excellent English, but with the metaphorical imagery so loved of Eastern people:

"Always beautiful; but now, robed as a princess of my nation, decked with Malayan flowers, your white skin softened to the sun-kissed nature of a beauty of our land, you shine before me like some star."

Still she remained silent, and he went on: "They have done their work well, and could you but see your beauty with these eyes of mine, you would not wonder that I should have thought the hours weary that kept me from your side. Helen—beautiful Helen, you used not to hide those eyes from mine. Look up; let me see them once again. We are alone here now. No prying creatures of your English people can see us. I have prayed to Allah that this hour might come, and now that I am here, humble—thy very slave—where is thy look of welcome—where is the tender look? For in thy maiden coyness say what thou wilt; but let thine eyes speak to me of love as they used so often at thy English home."

"How dare you!" she cried, finding words at last; "how dare you insult me by such a speech!" and she rose imperiously from her seat. "How dare you have me dragged from my home like this, and submitted by your orders to this disgraceful treatment, to make me look like one of your degraded race?"

"If my race be degraded," he said, quietly, "I try to elevate it by choosing you."

"I desire—I insist, sir, that you have me taken to my father now—at once."

The Rajah smiled, and crossed his arms over his breast.

"Let me think," he said. "Take you back? No; I could not take you back save as my wife. Your English people would have me shot."

"You were my father's guest, sir," continued Helen. "You were admitted to his house as friend, and you have behaved to him with the basest treachery. See! Look at me! It was by your orders I was disfigured thus!"

"Treachery!" he said, quietly. "No, there was no treachery, when I came as a prince and rajah, and said to the English merchant, 'I love your daughter: I will stoop and make her my wife.'"

"Stoop!" cried Helen, with a flash of her beautiful eyes.

"Yes," he said, "stoop! She has confessed her love!"

"It is false!" cried Helen.

"Not with words, but with her fierce dark eyes," he continued. "'I shall offend my people, but what of that? Love is all-powerful. I will dismiss all my wives, and she shall reign alone.' I went and said all that, as an English gentleman would have asked your hand, and what followed?"

Helen's eyes were fixed upon him sternly, and her heart condemned her, but she did not speak.

"I was treated with contempt and insult! I—I, Prince and Rajah here, was shown that I, who had stooped to love a woman of an infidel race, had been mocked and played with by the beautiful English maiden; and at that moment, Helen, had I seen you, I should have killed you with my kris, and then, in my mad rage, I would have done as my people do—run headlong here and there, killing and slaying as I went, my bare kris dripping with the blood I spilt—running *amok*, my people call it—and killing till they slew me where I ran. I, as a Malay, should have done all this. It is the custom among my people; but your English ways prevailed. I had learned English, and I, as a Prince, after my first wild rage was past, said that I must wait—be patient—and that the time would come when my revenge could be had. I waited patiently—and waited longer, to see if the lady would be kind and gentle to me once again; but she would not while she was among her people; so I said I would bring her amongst mine, where she would soon learn to be gentle and as kind as she was of old."

"Coward!" she cried, fiercely.

"I knew you would say that," he replied, mockingly. "I knew that you would assume to be very angry. You coquettes, as you English people call them, always do; and then, when all your angry, cruel things are said, you become tender, and gentle, and sweet. I do not mind."

Helen stamped her foot with impotent rage, as she felt how justly she had been appraised by this half-savage prince; but she could find no words in reply.

"Your people thought me contented, and that peace was made," he said, laughing. "I know all. There was a terrible state of fright at first, when you refused my hand. I know all, you see. Your people armed themselves and kept watch. 'The people of Murad will attack us, and take revenge,' you said, 'and we shall be all crushed;' and so you armed yourselves. Then you all feared to go to the *fête* lest there should be treachery, and I was watched; but they did not know my ways. I meant to have revenge; but what good would the blood of all your people be to me? That was not the revenge I wanted. I could wait, and I have waited with the result you see. There, is that good English? Do you understand these my words well?"

Helen did not answer, but stood there proud and defiant, though her heart quailed as she listened, and thought of the patient way in which this man had waited his time.

"I have had patience," he said, with a calm smile of superiority, which changed, to her horror, to one of earnestness, almost of appeal.

"You do not speak," he continued. "Must I say more—must I tell you how I loved you with all my soul! You made me love you, and were not content until I did. You led me on; you smiled at me, and lured me to your side. Your eyes told me you delighted in the passion you had roused, and you seemed to triumph in making me your slave. Then I asked you to be my wife, and I was cast aside, thrown off to make room for another, and I awoke from my dream to find that I had only been a plaything of your mocking hour. I was only a Malay—a black as your people call me in their contempt—and your father and all your people laughed at my pretensions to an English lady's hand. You all told me by your looks and treatment that I was presuming on the kindness I had received; but do you think that, though I bent to it then, as if you and yours were right, that I, an Eastern Prince, would bear this treatment at your hands? No; I planted my revenge at once, like some tiny seed, and since have watched it grow hour by hour till it was time to cut it down ripe and ready to my hand."

"Do you hear my words, sir?" said Helen, contemptuously. "I order you to take me back."

"The slave orders her master to take her back," said Murad, quietly. "You English think you have power over all."

"How dare you call me slave!" she cried.

"I call you what you are," he said, calmly; "my wife if you will; if not, one of my lowest slaves. I was your slave once, and would have been to the end. Now you are mine."

Helen shivered, but she mastered her fear, and exclaimed:

"Have you reckoned what your punishment will be for this? Do you suppose my people will let this pass?"

"I have weighed all," he said, coolly. "But let me talk, for I have much to say yet; I find relief in speaking of it all. Did you think that I was going to submit without resentment to the insult you had put upon me? Oh, no! You did not know what we Malays could do. We take a blow, and perhaps bear it then. It may be wise; but we never forgive the hand that gives that blow. We hide our suffering for a time, but at last we turn and strike. Do you understand me now? The time came at last, and I have turned and struck."

Helen remained silent, listening to his words, which sounded like a sentence of death; but she still fought hard not to show her terror, and kept up her defiant, half-contemptuous gaze as he went on:

"I hid all my sufferings, and patiently bore with all your cruelty, seeing without a word how you lavished your smiles upon this one and that, and all without making a sign; but all the time I was waiting, and telling myself that some day you should pay me for all this suffering; and when the good time came I said to my people: 'Take her and carry her to the house in the jungle; let her people think she is dead,' and it was done."

"And now that it has been done," cried Helen, "your plans are known. You have been followed, and you will have to suffer as you deserve—death is the punishment to the cowardly native hand that is raised against an English lady."

"Nonsense!" he said, laughing. "I have taken my steps better than that;" and his words which followed chilled Helen, as they robbed her of a hope. "No one saw you taken but that dreamy priest of your people, and he has been taken too. He wanders through our jungle finding flowers and plants, forgetting you half his time."

"It is false!" cried Helen. "He was here to-day."

"Yes, he was here to-day," said Murad, coolly, "and he has been taken back. He did not follow you. Do you suppose me so weak that I should let your people know where you had gone?"

"They must—they will know—that it is you who have done this cruel wrong," she cried, indignantly.

"No," he said, with a contemptuous laugh. "It is very easy to throw dust in English eyes. I will tell you for your comfort, and to make you settle to your fate, the people at the station think I am their friend, and that I have been helping them with my people to find you. And now you are only living in their hearts."

"In their hearts?" cried Helen, starting; and her thoughts involuntarily turned to Neil Harley.

"Yes," he said, quietly; "they think you dead."

"Dead!" she cried, in spite of her efforts to be calm.

"Yes; they believe you dead, and so you are to them. Helen the Englishwoman is dead, and this a beautiful Malay—my wife."

"Dead?" she cried again, for his announcement came like a terrible shock.

"Yes; they found a boat down the river far below the station. They think you went with two of your lovers on the water, and that the boat filled and sank, to be washed up on a bank. It was well managed, and Helen and three of her friends or lovers are mourned as dead."

"Mr Harley is not imprisoned too?" cried Helen.

"No; he is not a lover," said the Sultan, smiling.

"Oh, Heaven help me!" muttered Helen.

"So you are dead to them," he said, quietly. "Helen Perowne, the beautiful English girl, is no more, and in her place lives the Malay princess I see before me now. Ah, Helen, no one would know you. It is only I who have the knowledge of the change. What is it to be—my honoured wife or slave?"

"It is horrible!" thought Helen, as now she realised more fully the extent of the iniquitous plot of which she had been made the victim. By Murad's words the hopes of succour she had nurtured had been swept one by one away, for she did not doubt him in the least, but felt her heart sink as she realised how helpless her position was, for his words seemed to carry truth with them, and she knew that she alone was to blame.

Then she started violently, and shrank back towards the wall, for he had taken a step or two towards her and stretched out his hands.

Volume Two—Chapter Twenty Nine.

At Bay.

The Rajah stopped when Helen shrank away, as if he did not wish to alarm her unduly.

"Why do you shrink from me?" he said, with a laugh. "You were not so timid when I talked with you after dinner, and you invited me with smiles to stay by your side. Did you think when you began to play with my love that it was of the same cold stuff as that of your poor, weak English wooers?"

Helen made no reply, but gazed at him watchfully, meaning to elude his grasp and run to the door should he approach her again.

"Your English wooers' hearts are like ice, and their love is cold; while that of a Malay, under his calm, quiet demeanour, glows like fire, and once kindled, is never more extinct. Do you hear me, Helen? Once you set it burning with the light of love, his heart flames until it ceases to beat. There, why be angry with me, and try to wither me with those cruel looks? I took you because you made me love you; and as you did make me love you, I shall never believe that you are anything but glad that I forced you to be my wife."

"Be your wife?" she cried, passionately, in spite of her determination not to speak. "I would sooner die!"

"Yes," he replied with a contemptuous laugh, "that is what all women say. The girls who waited upon you said just the same. They told me they hated me, and ended by hanging upon my neck and calling me husband and their own. Tell me you hate me!" he cried, with his dark eyes seeming to flash; "tell me you will have me killed for what I have done—tell me you will never look upon my face again, and make those beautiful eyes dart anger at me. It makes me happier than I can tell you, for I know that the storm will pass away; and when the lightning of your eyes and their rain of tears have gone, the sunshine of your love will gladden my heart. Helen, I have waited for you—oh, so long!"

He took another step or two forward, and was about to catch her hand in his, but she avoided his touch and fled to the window.

"Come a step nearer to me," she panted, her face convulsed with dread, "and I will call for help."

"Nonsense!" he said, with a smile. "Why should you call? Is it for the birds to hear? The tigers will not awaken till 'tis night. Why should you weary yourself and hurt that sweet-tuned throat? Call for help? Who would hear you call?"

"Your people!" she panted, as her dread increased. "They are here below!"

"Yes," he said, "they are here below and about the place, but they are deaf. You forget that I am not the poor Malay, looked down upon with disdain by your proud English friends, but Prince and Rajah. You would make my servants and my slaves hear, but not one would stir. You do not understand my power, Helen—the power of the man you scorned! Should one of my people dare to come here ere I summoned him, he would die!"

"It is not true!" cried Helen, with spirit. "Knowing who I am, they would come, and if I appealed to them, protect me."

Murad laughed a contemptuous, cynical laugh.

"You forget where you are," he said. "This is one of my homes, and this is my land. I am poor Rajah Murad whom you look upon with contempt at Sindang station; but here I am the people's Lord. Who dare contradict me or disobey commands? No one. For the life or death of my people rests with me. So you may leave that window and accept your lot."

Helen did not move.

"There, put away all that silly woman's play!" he cried. "I tell you it is like my foolish native girls behave. You are an English lady, and should be wiser. Come, let us be friends at once, and I will become more English for your sake. You will forgive me for bringing you away; it was the love I bore you made me act as I did. You will forgive me, will you not? Have I not had you made ten times more beautiful than you were before?"

He made a feint, and then a couple of quick strides towards her, and this time caught her by the wrist; but in her dread and horror she wrenched it away, and struck him sharply across the face as she would have struck at some noxious beast; and as he started back in surprise, she bounded to the door, and tried to wrench it open.

Murad's love appeared to turn in a moment to furious hate; his eyes darkened and seemed to emit a lurid light; his teeth appeared between his lips, which were drawn apart like those of some wild beast, and the man's savage nature blazed out in a moment under the affront. In an instant his hand sought the hilt of his kris, and tearing the weapon from its sheath, he pursued his prisoner as she fled from him shrieking round the room.

Helen fled from him but for a few moments, and then she stopped short and faced him, offering herself to his blow.

This brave act disarmed him, checking his rage, which seemed to have flashed out, and his English education began to tell. Muttering impatiently, he thrust the kris back into its sheath, and uttered a forced laugh.

"Foolish girl!" he cried, "why did you strike me? It is folly! It makes me angry. A Malay never forgives a blow; but you have made me English, and I forgive you because—because you make me fond. But it was wild and foolish. I give you my love, you play with me and strike me a blow. A woman should not strike the man she loves."

Helen did not reply, but rushed to and tore furiously at the door.

"Why do you tire yourself?" he cried, with a contemptuous laugh. "What good can you do? I tell you once again my people dare not stir to help you, even if you wished; and I know enough of woman's nature to tell that, from such a finished coquette as you have always been, this is but a false show of dread."

Helen's despair grew deeper as she listened to the Rajah's words, and reading her thoughts aright, he went on calmly enough:

"I do not mind. You know I love you, and at heart I believe you love me. But what matter if you do not? You will when you are my wife. You will be quite contented here, and very soon forget your own people and their ways. It will be a change for an English beauty to become a Malay princess, and you shall even have a new name. Still angry? There, pray calm down. It is because I had you fetched so suddenly away; for I know you, Helen. You are not weeping for any other lover. Out of so many you could care for none more than for me."

Still Helen did not reply, but stood at bay, her eyes dilated, and backing from him whenever he made as if to approach her, till, with a scornful laugh, he gave up the pursuit and threw himself carelessly upon one of the divans.

"Why should I weary myself by running after you?" he said, with a mocking laugh. "That is all past, and you must plead to me. Foolish girl, how could you return even if you wished! They think you dead, and who would know Helen

Perowne in you?"

She started a little here, and he noted it and smiled.

"I have waited and can wait still, for I know that as soon as this fit is over you will creep to my feet like any other slave I have. I know what you are thinking—that you will escape."

"And mark my words, I shall!" cried Helen, impetuously.

"Don't try it," he said, smiling. "Don't try it, for your own sake as well as mine. It sounds cruel, but it is a custom of this country to spear a slave who is seen to run away; and if my people fail to take you, and I do not think they would, the tigers would prove less merciful. You must have heard them when the night has come; they roam about this place, and the more I kill them the more they seem to come.

"What!" he said, laughing, "you would rather trust to the tender mercies of the beasts than trust to me! I read it in your scornful eyes, but that is not true, or a time back you would not have looked tenderly in mine and sighed and pressed my hand at parting."

He laughed aloud as he saw her shrink and cower away in her abasement for very shame. She was reaping now the fruits of her career of folly; and if ever woman bitterly repented her weakness and the trifling of which she had been guilty in her love of admiration, that woman was Helen Perowne, as she stood there shamefaced and crushed as it were by the thoughts of the past.

"That is right," he said, quietly. "You are thinking of the past. But never mind; that is all gone now. It was English Helen who was so weak; it is Malay Helen who will become strong. My people have done well, and how it becomes you! Your friends would never know you now."

What should she do?

Helen's hands closed, and her fingers were tightly enlaced as she tried to find a way out of her difficulties. She knew that threats would be in vain, and supplication to him to set her free like so many wasted words. There was no way out but by gaining the mastery over her enemy once more. Her enemy! But he must be treated like a friend. Only a few brief months back, and this man, at whose mercy she now was, seemed the veriest slave. Well, why not once again? she asked herself. She was as young and beautiful as ever they said. He loved her—he must love her—and why should she not sway him by this love? It was her only hope, and she grasped at it to try.

"Well," he said, smiling mockingly, "will you not find a place here by my side?"

She was silent for a few moments, and then, making an effort:

"You have done me a cruel injury, Rajah," she exclaimed, her voice trembling, but becoming firmer with each word she spoke.

"Injury!" he said, smiling; and his eyes glittered at the success that promised to attend his plans. "Oh, no; not injury. It can be no injury to a beautiful woman to make her the wife of a rich Malay prince—one who loves her with all his heart—a rajah who loves your English ways, and who will surround you with everything you wish."

"You will give me my liberty?" said Helen.

"Yes," he said; "whatever my beautiful princess can desire."

She made a gesture full of impatience, and remained silent for a few moments to gather calmness before she spoke again.

"You have spoken of the past, Rajah Murad," she said at last, in a low musical voice.

"Yes," he said, smiling; "that happy past."

"I was very weak and foolish then, Rajah," she said. "I was but a girl, and I fear I loved admiration. It was that which made me act so foolishly and ill. But when I tell you my sorrow for my acts—when I tell you how bitterly I repent it all—you will forgive me, and will take me back."

"For your people to seize and shoot me like a dog?" he said, quietly.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, "they would not do you harm. You will have taken me back, and for this they shall not do you ill."

"Speak again like that," he cried with his eyes lighting up. "That makes you look more beautiful than you were before."

She started and shuddered, but she went on:

"I ask your forgiveness for the wrong I, in my foolish, girlish wilfulness, did you; and now that you have punished me so severely as you have, you will pardon me, Rajah—the weak, helpless woman who prays you to send her back."

"I punish you!" he cried, with an affectation of surprise. "I would not punish you. To keep you with me it was necessary that you should look like these my people, and I was sorry to give orders that it should be done. I half feared the result; but I do not repent it now that I have seen how it makes you more beautiful than ever."

"But you will take me back to my father?" she pleaded. "I will forgive everything. I will not breathe a word about this outrage. No one shall know that it was Rajah Murad who took me from my home. Only send me back safely, and I will bless you."

He laughed softly.

"There are steps some men take," he said, "that can never be retraced, and this I have done is one of those steps. You are a woman of sense, and know your people. I staked all upon this cast, and I have won. If I give way now, what will the English people, who are so proud of their honour, say to the beauty of their station, who comes back to them darkened like one of us? What will they say to the lady who comes back to them after so many days in Rajah Murad's harem?"

Helen started as if she had been stung, and her eyes flashed their indignation at this cowardly speech.

But she felt directly after that anger would be useless—that she must gain time; and once more trembling in every limb, she forced herself to plead.

"I have some mastery over him," she thought, and determining to retain, and if possible strengthen it, she forced back every semblance of anger, and placed her hands together in supplication.

"You told me once that you loved me," she said softly.

"I told you once? I have told myself I loved you a thousand times," he cried passionately.

"Then you would not disgrace me in the eyes of my people?" she pleaded.

"No," he cried. "I would not; I love you far too well."

"Then set me free—send me back to my home."

"That would be to disgrace you, foolish girl," he cried. "Do you not see why I took this step? You made me love you, and when you cast me off, I tell you I made a vow that you should still be mine. I had you brought here. Well, I am as jealous of your honour as you are yourself. You cannot leave here but as my wife."

A sob of rage and indignation choked Helen's utterance for the moment, but she mastered it once more and turned upon him.

"Is this your love for me," she cried, "to cause me this dreadful pain."

"Pain perhaps now," he said quietly; "but happiness will come for both. You proud and foolish girl, you do not know what it is to be the wife of a prince such as I am. Let your people go. Mine will do far more honour to their new princess; they will worship you. They must and shall. There, I see you are listening to what I say. You are growing sensible; let this strange feeling wear away. Be gentle to me Helen—love—and be content to stay!"

Helen's brow grew wrinkled, and her eyes were half-closed as she stood there with clasped hands, asking herself how she should act. She was checked at every double, and the hopelessness of her position had never appeared more strongly to her than it did now. Her eyes wandered to the door, to the window, and then to the Rajah, as he half reclined upon the mats, gazing at her with a smiling, satisfied look, as if watching the feeble efforts made by his captive to escape from his toils.

"Well," he said, laughing, "has the fit of anger passed away? If not I can wait."

She did not answer, but stood gazing at him with a piteous look in her eyes—gazing so pleadingly that he sprang to his feet, a change coming over his countenance as he approached her.

Helen's heart gave one great throb of joy, for she read now in his face the power she had over him still. He really loved her, and it was he who was the slave, not she, and she would yet be able to mould him to her will.

But not by anger and reproach: they would only weaken her position. She had found that he was one who might be moved by her woman's grief and tears, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, she waited until he was close at hand, and then, before he could stay her, she sank upon her knees, to clasp his hands in hers, and gazing in his face, burst into a passionate flood of tears.

End of Volume Two.

Volume Three—Chapter One.

Chumbley's Idea.

"Chumbley," said Bertie Hilton, "your behaviour towards that woman was sickening—almost disgusting! How you could be even civil to her is more than I can understand!"

"Oh, I'm always civil to a woman," drawled Chumbley. "See how affable I always was to Helen Perowne, who—"

"Will you have the goodness to leave Miss Perowne's name out of the conversation?" said Hilton, with asperity.

"Certainly, if you wish it, and substitute little Stuart's name. See how civil I always was to her."

"A merit certainly," said Hilton, contemptuously. "Who could help being civil to so amiable and good a little body!"

"Here, hang it, Bertie, old man!" cried Chumbley, in mock alarm, "don't monopolise all the nice women. It was Helen Perowne the other day. Now you seem dead on little Stuart!"

"Confound Helen Perowne!" muttered Hilton, bitterly.

"Just as you like; and confound the Inche Maida too—I shan't! Sort of sympathetic pity for woman—weaker vessels, you know."

"Weaker vessel?" laughed Hilton, scornfully; "what, our captor?"

"Well, she isn't a bad sort of woman," replied Chumbley.

"Not a bad sort of woman? Why, she's a modern Jezebel—a Cleopatra—a Semiramis!"

"Think so?" said Chumbley, quietly.

"Think so? Of course! I'm getting terribly tired of this captivity! I must get away somehow. How many days have we been here?"

"Week," said Chumbley, laconically.

"A week of weeks it seems to me," said Hilton. "Horrible woman!"

"Well, I don't know," said Chumbley, "she seems to possess very great taste."

"Taste? The savage!"

"Well, great taste in taking a fancy to you. I think you ought to be very proud."

"Proud? I sicken with disgust! Pah! Don't let's talk about her, but try and make some plan to escape."

"Well, yes, I suppose we must do that; but 'pon my word, old fellow, I don't see how. I wish old Bolter were here."

"I wish Mrs Bolter were here to tackle this dreadful woman!" laughed Hilton. "We men can't manage her; but that clever, sharp little body would bring her to her senses. What do you want Bolter for?"

"Oh, he'd mix up a dose for the guards, and give it to them in their tea, or whatever they drink; then they'd go to sleep, and we could calmly walk back to the fort."

"I wonder what Harley thinks of our absence?"

"Thinks we're dead, probably, and reposing happily each of us in a crocodile sarcophagus. Well, Bertie, old man, what's to be done? The Inche Maida has quite cut us it seems, and we're all alone, I suppose. Come, what's to be done to get us out of this plight? You're quite right, old fellow; it is most absurd!"

"Absurd? It is disgraceful! I feel as if we were not men, but a couple of silly girls!"

"With beards," said Chumbley.

"And now give me your advice."

"Well, that's soon done," replied Chumbley. "I've quite made up my mind what advice I shall give."

"Well, what?"

"Do you mean what shall we do?"

"Yes; of course."

"Nothing."

Hilton uttered an ejaculation that was far from pious, and began to fume and fret, till Chumbley rose in his slow, cumbrous fashion, placed a cigar in his friend's hand, and bade him smoke it.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, quietly, "if we are to escape, it can only be when a chance offers itself; and if you will bring your profound wisdom to bear upon the matter, you will see that all we can do is to wait for that chance."

"And until that chance comes we must put up with this wretched woman's insults!"

"Yes, if you like to call them so; and I'd do it, old fellow, without getting into a bad temper and calling names, seeing —"

"Seeing what?"

"That she tries to make up for her rather unladylike conduct by being very civil; while her cooking is good, the dinners excellent, and the breakfasts, the wines well chosen, and the cigars—there, did you ever smoke a better than that?"

"Oh, pish! Everyone can't take things as quietly as you do, Chumb."

"Poor fellows, no," said the latter, with a satisfied air. "It's the only quality I possess of which I am really proud. You see it makes me perfectly well suited for this climate, for no troubles or worries ever put me in a perspiration. I wish, though, we had a chess-board and men."

"Chess-board! men!" retorted Hilton, laughing, in a half-amused, half-vexed tone; "who in the world could ever think of playing chess! Really, Chumbley, I believe you are quite happy and contented."

"Well, not so bad, dear boy—not so bad now the novelty and the unpleasantly of the affair have worn off. You see, a fellow has only so long to live. Well, isn't it a pity to spoil any of that time by making yourself miserable if you can help it? Take my advice and behave as young Jacob Faithful suggested, 'Take it coolly;' and as the sailor in another story I once read said, 'if you can't take it coolly, soldier, take it as coolly as you can.'"

Hilton bit the end of his cigar and then bit his lips; lay back thinking of Helen and then of Grey Stuart, the latter obtaining the larger portion of his thoughts.

As for Chumbley, he lay back on his divan and smoked, and thought it was very tiresome to be detained there, but granted that it was better than being detained in hospital from wounds or sickness; and as time wore on, Hilton, removed from the cares and anxieties of being one of Helen's lovers, settled down more and more into an imitation of his friend's coolness, his common-sense teaching him that Chumbley was right, and that his best chance of escaping was by waiting for his opportunity—whenever that opportunity should come.

They had not seen anything of the Princess for some days, for she had evidently left them to cool down; but they had been admirably treated, and had grown a little less impatient of their prison, when one day a Malay servant entered their room, and with the most profound respect announced that the Inche Maida awaited the English chiefs in another room.

"Well, that's not such bad treatment of prisoners, if it don't mean a polite summons to execution. You first, old fellow; I'm only here as your confidential man."

As he spoke, Chumbley rose slowly, left his hookah, and prepared to follow the servant; while Hilton frowned, declared that it was all very ridiculous, but smoothing his countenance, he followed the Malay, and was ushered by him into a similar room to that which they had left, to find dinner laid out in a by no means untempting style, the Malay fashion being largely supplemented by additions that the Princess had not been slow to copy from her English friends.

The Inche Maida was elegantly dressed, as Chumbley said, like her table, for her costume was as much European as Malayan, her long sweeping robe, and the delicate lace cap that rested upon her magnificent black hair, having a decidedly Parisian look, while her scarf was the simple sarong of her country, glowing with bright colours.

She smiled as they entered, but her demeanour was full of dignity, as she offered Hilton her hand, that he might lead her to the table.

Hilton drew himself up and was evidently about to refuse. The next moment he relented, and took a step forward, but he was too late to pay his hostess the compliment she asked, for she had turned to Chumbley, who held out his arm and led her to the head of the table, retiring afterwards to the foot, and facing her, while Hilton took the place upon the Princess's right.

Perfectly unaware of Helen Perowne's position, the two prisoners, under the genial influences of a good dinner and unexceptionable wine, while granting that their situation was perfectly absurd, were ready to acknowledge that after all it would be nonsense to do otherwise than accept it, make the best of it, and refuse to be angry about a foolish woman's freak.

"I won't be disagreeable any more," thought Hilton, "but take things as they come, and be off at the first opportunity."

"Pon my word," thought Chumbley, "this is better than that hot room at the fort. One always seems to be swallowing hot sunshine like melted butter with everything there one eats."

The result was that Hilton forgot all about Helen Perowne for the time, and found himself comparing Grey Stuart with the Inche Maida as the two opposite poles of womanly beauty—the acme of the dark, and the acme of the fair. But his thoughts were to a great extent turned from the ladies to the dinner, and following Chumbley's example, he ate heartily, drank pretty liberally of the wine—to drown care, he said—and by the time that the dessert was commenced he had concluded that life would after all be bearable without the society of Helen Perowne, who was, he told himself, a contemptible coquette.

He recanted from that declaration soon afterwards, the terms being, he thought, too hard; and then he fell into a state of wonderment at his contented frame of mind.

"I shall begin to think soon that the wound is after all not very deep."

"Your friend seems to be getting resigned to his lot," said the Princess, in a low voice to Chumbley, as, after dinner, they sat by the open window with a little table covered with fruit by their side, Hilton having kept his place.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Chumbley, thoughtfully; and then, to turn the conversation into another channel, "How do you manage to get such good claret here?"

"Oh," she said, laughing, "I am able to get most things here to help out the wants of our country. It is easy to have such things from Singapore. You like it?"

"It is delicious."

"I am glad," she said, with a satisfied smile. "I reserve it for my best friends."

"Then why give it to us, your prisoners—and enemies?" said Chumbley, sharply.

"I was trying to show you that you were my friends, and not my enemies," said the Princess, quietly.

"But you treat us like prisoners, Princess."

"Only for your good. You shall both be free and lords of the place whenever you will."

"But, my dear madam," said Hilton, from his place by the larger table, "this is the nineteenth century—Chumbley, a little more claret? You seize us as a baron might have seized people three or four hundred years ago, and yet you treat us as an English lady would her guests."

"It is what I have tried to do—this treatment," she said, simply. Then with spirit, "What is it to me what people did a long while back? I hope, Mr Chumbley, you are satisfied."

"With my dinner?" said the latter. "Yes, perfectly, for my part. It only wants a cup of coffee."

"Not poisoned?" said the Princess, with a laughing, malicious look at her guest, as she thus recalled to him his suspicions at the *fête*.

As she spoke she clapped her hands, and coffee was brought in little silver cups upon a silver tray.

"Hilton, old man," said Chumbley, as he took and liberally sugared a cup of coffee, smiling at the Inche Maida as he spoke.

"Well?" said his companion in misfortune.

"I have quite made up my mind, as I before hinted, not to knock the feathers off my noble breast against the bars of my cage."

The Princess looked puzzled.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Hilton; "don't be absurd."

"Why not? If to be patient in our present awkward position is being absurd. Won't you take coffee, Princess?"

She shook her head, but altered her mind directly.

"Yes," she said; and she took the cup Chumbley offered with a smile, while as he provided himself with a second, he nodded and said to himself:

"That's very ladylike; so that we should not feel suspicious, I presume."

"Ask her how long she means to keep on with this theatrical folly," said Hilton, in a low voice to his friend—in French.

"What does he say?" cried the Princess, quickly. "He asks if you are still in earnest about keeping us prisoners," said Chumbley. "If you are serious."

"Earnest? Serious?" she replied, with her eyes flashing. "Should I have taken such a step as this, and risked offending your people, if I were not serious? Suppose I let you go—what then?"

"If Hilton has his own way," said Chumbley, laughing, "there will be an expedition to come and burn your place about your ears for abducting two of her Majesty's subjects."

"No, no—no, no!" cried the Inche Maida, with a negative motion of her hand. "You would not be so cowardly as to come and attack a weak woman; that is for the Malays to do. You English are too brave and strong. I am not afraid."

"Well, I don't know," said Chumbley; "we might, you know."

"Oh, no, I won't believe it."

"Well, perhaps not," said Chumbley, drily; "but history has a few ugly little records of English doings here and there. Do you know, madam, that you have given us an excellent excuse to pay you a peculiar visit?"

"What! to come and attack and destroy my home—to kill my people?" cried the Princess, excitedly. "You could not—you dare not. But I am safe. I shall not let you go; and as to my other enemies, in a short time you will both be reconciled to your lot, and you will say, 'Let me stop and defend you.'"

"Hope told a flattering tale," muttered Chumbley, as he saw the Princess watching Hilton as she spoke; but his distant mien and contemptuous looks so annoyed her that she turned from him angrily and addressed herself to his friend, as if for him to speak.

"Well," said the latter, coolly, "I am an Englishman, and I like fair play, so I shall speak out. Look here; you know, Princess, it won't do."

"What do I know that will not do?" she said, in a puzzled way.

"Why, this foolish kidnapping business of yours; and I frankly tell you that, much as we shall regret leaving such charming quarters, if you only leave the birds' cage door open for a moment we shall pop out and fly away."

"I do not quite know what you mean about your birds in cages and your kidnapping," said the Princess, haughtily; "but I suppose you mean that you will go."

"Exactly," said Chumbley, coolly.

"Then," said the Princess, "I should have thought, for the favours I offer you—the great position and brilliant prospects—you would be grateful now you have had time to reflect, instead of treating me with disdain."

"Well," replied Chumbley, in his dry way, "that's the nature of the English animal."

"Talk sensibly," said Hilton, in French; "why do you go on in that flippant way—why do you keep on arguing with her?"

"Because you will not," retorted Chumbley, in the same language; "so hold your tongue. You see, Princess," he continued, "you don't understand the British nature, and this is how it is. If we fellows could not get those positions you offer, we might make a struggle for them; but as you offer them, and tell us we must have them, you set all our bristles erect, and we vow we will not have them at any price. No: my dear madam, you have gone the wrong way to work, and it will not do."

The Inche Maida recoiled, as if the obstacles she was encountering stung her to the quick. She had evidently been under the impression that her patience and the treatment to which she had subjected her prisoners would have had a different effect, whereas they were as disdainful and obstinate as ever.

"You will think better of this," she cried, impatiently.

Hilton made a sign as if to negative her words.

"Then if you reject kindness I shall try harshness," she cried, her dark eyes flashing as she spoke. "I am Princess here, and my slaves obey me. I will have you starved into submission."

Hilton smiled.

"Tell her she doesn't know what an Englishman is, Chumbley," he said, scornfully; "or no—be silent. Do not insult her, but treat her words with contempt."

"He need not tell me," said the Inche Maida, starting up and looking furious, as her eyes literally glittered in her rage. "I know, sir, what some Englishmen are—cold, proud, and haughty; men who think themselves almost gods in their conceit; while all who are not pale-faced like themselves they treat as dogs. Go to your prison, sir, and you shall learn that, proud and contemptuous as you are, there are others who can be as proud and cold."

Chumbley was about to speak, but she waved him back.

"I brought you to my place that I might make you lord, master, and defender of my people. You thrust my favours from you. Let it be so. You shall not enjoy them. Stay as my prisoner till I please to free you, and then go back to your people, and beg, and fawn, and ask Helen Perowne to give you one of the smiles and sweet looks that she shares among so many."

"I cannot bear this!" muttered Hilton, turning purple with rage.

"Hold your tongue! Don't be an idiot," growled Chumbley. "It is only a woman speaking."

"Idiot!" exclaimed the Inche Maida, who just, caught the word. "She will not have you when you do go back, for by this time she is someone's wife."

"I do not believe you!" cried Hilton, angrily.

"You may," she replied, with an angry gesture. "Now listen; I can be generous, but I can be hard as well, and I shall keep you my prisoner. I have brought you here, and I have done with you; I reject you, I would not listen to you now if you went upon your knees to me. I could not bear it, for I should know then it was only false. I say I shall keep you here for my own safety now; but though I have cast you off, I would not have your blood upon my hands. Remember, my people are charged to watch you, and they are Malays—faithful to the death. They would have been faithful to you, my lord, but you have refused. Now listen. My orders will be obeyed, as they were when I said I wish those two English chiefs brought here unhurt. Mind this, then; any attempt at escape will end in your falling by either kris or spear. Now go."

She stood there looking very handsome and disdainful, pointing to the door, and the two officers had no alternative but to get up and walk towards the entry. Here, however, Chumbley paused, and turned back to where his imperious captor was standing with flashing eyes.

"We are too old friends to quarrel," he said, good-humouredly. "Of course we shall try to escape, and we should do so

if you had twice as many people to guard us. You have done a very foolish thing.”

“No!” she cried. “It was my will.”

“All the same a very foolish thing in bringing us here. Now, take my advice, as a friend; send us back at once.”

“No!” she said, fiercely.

“Yes; for your own sake.”

“No,” she cried, “leave me.”

“I promise you,” he continued, “that I will do all I can to hush the matter up. You will be reasonable. I should not like to see so brave and good a woman come to grief.”

“Go! Leave me!” she cried, fiercely. “I will not listen. I am a Malay Princess, and he has insulted and wronged me.”

“Well: there,” said Chumbley. “I’m going. Good-night.”

He held out his broad white hand, but the Inche Maida raised hers and struck at it angrily, her palm descending in Chumbley’s with a loud pat.

The young officer only smiled, bent his head, and turned to join Hilton in the other room.

As he reached the door, however, he heard a step, a hand was laid upon his arm, and a hoarse voice whispered:

“I am sorry—I was angry—forgive.”

Hilton had strode to the end of his prison, and thrown himself in a dissatisfied frame of mind upon the mats; the door had swung to, and there was a heavy curtain between, so that he did not hear what was said, nor see the hearty pressure of the hand that succeeded before Chumbley left the dining-room and joined his friend; while the Malay princess stood alone, with her hands clasped and her bosom heaving.

“I have been an idiot, and mad,” she muttered to herself. “He is right; I have done wrong, but I cannot go back now; I should lose all. I do not know these Englishmen. I thought he would have been proud and glad, and now he looks down upon me, and I feel so low—so crushed—that I could kill myself with rage. Ah! why do I not know more of their ways? I am but a poor, weak savage still, and I show my temper like a child.”

She walked wearily to the window, and stood with her broad forehead leaning against the bars, and for quite an hour neither of her women dared to approach her.

“Well, old fellow, feel any better for your dinner?” said Chumbley, heartily, as he strode up to the divan.

“Dinner? No. Hang the woman; how dare she insult us like that?” chafed Hilton. “As if there were anything between Helen Perowne now and me.”

“It was rather warm upon you, certainly,” said Chumbley; “but she was wild, and you were not above a few bitter repartees.”

“Bitter? Why, you are taking the Jezebel’s part!”

“Come, come, come, don’t call ugly names,” said Chumbley, sturdily.

“No name is too bad for such a woman!” cried Hilton.

“Drop it, I say,” cried Chumbley. “We’ve eaten her dinner and drunk her wine. Don’t let’s abuse her now.”

“Why hang it, Chum, have you fallen in love with the black goddess?” cried Hilton. “There, go and beg pardon, then; woo her, and wed her. Ha, ha, ha!” he laughed, mockingly, without seeing the hot angry spots in his companion’s cheeks. “I resign in your favour. The life would just suit you. Come: here’s a chance for you to prove a good friend to me, most miserable fellow under the sun. Go and tell her you will be my hostage. You are big enough.”

“And ugly enough,” growled Chumbley.

“You’ll soon get sunburned out here in the jungle. Hail, Rajah Chumbley! Thy servant bends the knee.”

“You be blowed!” said the young officer, speaking like a schoolboy; and the tone of his voice showed so much vexation that Hilton checked his banter. “I’m going to have one pipe,” said Chumbley, “and then I shall have a nap.”

“Stop a minute,” said Hilton. “What did she mean about Helen being another’s wife?” he continued, biting at his moustache—“not that I care.”

“Goodness knows, unless Murad has carried her off at the same time.”

“*What!*”

“I say unless Murad has been playing the same game.”

“Don’t talk like that,” panted Hilton. “I don’t care a *sou* for the girl now; I wouldn’t marry her to save my life; I

couldn't after her base treatment. But Chum, old fellow, that idea of yours is like a lance thrust through me, for I did love her, and to come to that—Oh, Heaven help her! I could not bear that."

"Oh, tush! tush!" said Chumbley, sitting up once more. "Don't take any notice. An angry woman will say anything. It was only a fancy of mine. It can't be true."

"Chum," said Hilton, in a low whisper, and his voice sounded very strange in the gathering darkness, "I beg your pardon for what I said. I was bitter and angry."

"All right, old fellow. It's all gone."

"Then listen. Can we get away to-night?"

"No. Why?"

"I feel as if I couldn't stop here after what you said. I tell you I hate Helen Perowne now devoutly, but I'd go through fire and water to save her from that black scoundrel. Why did you think such a thing?"

"I don't know; it came into my head. It appeared possible. We were spirited off, and it seemed so easy for Murad to carry her off in the same way. I suppose what the Princess said set me thinking."

"If she is in his power," began Hilton—"Oh, it is not possible! She led him on so, too. That foolish love of admiration!"

"That's the right term, Bertie. She never cared for you any more than she did for me."

"No," said Hilton, bitterly, "I believe you are right; but I was such a vain, conceited idiot, I thought myself far above you all. Chumbley, do you believe what you said?"

Chumbley looked across the little space between them towards his friend; but it was quite dark now, and the voices seemed to come out of a black void.

"No, old fellow, no," he replied. "It was a passing fancy. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Then there was silence in the room, though neither of the men slept; Hilton lying in a state of feverish excitement, and Chumbley thinking over his words.

"What made me say that, I wonder?" he muttered. "Suppose it should be true, and that all this while the ruffian has been playing dark. By Jove! it is very likely; much more likely than for a couple of fellows to be carried off. Poor girl! No, it is impossible. I will not believe it. Let's think of something else. Now then, how are we to get away from here?"

"Sleep, Chumbley?" said Hilton.

"If I answer and say *no*" thought Chumbley, "he will lie talking for hours. I'll hold my tongue."

"Fast asleep," muttered Hilton to himself; "that fellow has no more soul than an ox," and turning his head on the cushion that formed his pillow, he lay there in the feverish hot night, thinking of Helen Perowne, while the distant roar of some prowling tiger kept reaching his ear; and it was not until the thought of Grey Stuart's soft eyes, looking truthfully at his, came like something soft and gentle to cool his heated imagination, that he finally dropped asleep, forgetting his troubles for the time.

Volume Three—Chapter Two.

A Search for Gold.

If anyone else on the station had even talked of making an expedition up the river beneath the beams of that ardent sun Dr Bolter would have exclaimed:

"Ah, of course. Here am I, toiling from morn to night with hand and brain, to keep you people in decent health, and yet you propose such a piece of insanity as that! Why, sir, you must be mad!"

But then the doctor was mad upon his own particular subject, and neither heat nor storm would have kept him back. The sun now had tremendous power, and even his Malay boatmen looked hot; but the doctor's face only shone, and he sat back in the stern, gun in hand, carefully scanning the shore, ready to bring down the first attractive specimen he saw to add to his collection.

The boat was well supplied with necessaries, including a waterproof sheet, and a handy tent if he should camp ashore; but the boat was to be for the most part his camping-place; and, according to his preconceived plan, the doctor meant to force his way right up a branch or tributary of the main river—a stream that had never yet been, as far as he knew, explored; and here he was hopeful of making his way close up to the mountains, continuing the journey on foot when the river became too narrow and swift for navigation.

In this intent the boat was steadily propelled up-stream, and at the end of the second day the Inche Maida's campong and home had been passed, and unseen they had placed some miles between them and the Princess's people.

The Inche Maida was very friendly, but the knowledge that she would perhaps be down before many hours were over

at the station, made the doctor fix his time for passing in the dusk of the evening, for he did not wish his movements to reach his wife's ears sooner than he could help, nor yet to be canvassed by his friends.

Hence, then, he slept that night with his boat secured to the trunk of a large cocoa-palm, well covered in from the night dew, and with a bit of quinine on the tip of his tongue when he lay down to keep off the fever.

Neither he nor his men troubled themselves about the weird noises of the jungle, nor the rushings and splashings that disturbed the river. There were dangerous reptiles and other creatures around, but they did not disturb them; and when the loud roar of a tiger was heard not many yards away, amidst the dense bushes of the shore, the doctor merely turned over and uttered a low grunt, muttering in his sleep about Mrs Bolter breathing so hard.

The next morning before the white mist had risen from the river, the Malays were busy with their paddles, and they had gone on about five or six miles when one of the men ceased rowing, and held up his hand to command silence.

"A big boat coming down the river pulled by many oars, master," said the man, "a fighting prahu, I think. Shall we hide?"

"Hide? no," exclaimed the doctor. "Why?"

"It may be an enemy who will make us prisoners, perhaps kill us," said the Malay, softly. "We are thy servants, and we will go on if you say go."

"Perhaps I had better not," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "It would spoil the expedition. Hah! yes, I can hear the oars now. But where could we hide?"

"If the master bids us, we will place the boat so that no one passing shall see, and we can see all," replied the Malay.

Doctor Bolter did not like hiding, but thinking that in this case discretion might be the better part of valour, he replaced his shot cartridge with ball, as he gave the signal to the man, who turned the sampan in shore; and cleverly guiding it in amongst the overhanging vegetation, this dropped behind them and they were in a verdant tunnel, the branches and leaves just touching their heads, and though themselves completely concealed, able to see everything that passed or repassed upon the river.

They had occupied their place of hiding so long, that, had he not still heard the regular beat-beat of the large boat's oars, the doctor would have concluded that it had passed. Still it seemed wonderful how the water bore the sound, for it was what seemed to be a considerable time before they saw the prow of a long prahu come round a bend of the river with its long banks of oars making the calm surface of the rapid river foam, as the long vessel glided on, coming in very close to them, so as to cut off a good deal of the next bend.

They were so close that Doctor Bolter could note the expression upon the countenances of the men, and it seemed almost impossible that the little boat and its crew could remain unseen; but the prahu passed on, and round the next bend, the doctor waiting till the beat of the paddles was growing faint before he gave the word for them to proceed.

"Are those friends or enemies?" he said to one of the boatmen.

The Malay smiled.

"Who knows?" he said. "To-day they may be friends, to-morrow enemies. The prahu is Rajah Murad's, and the crew his men."

The doctor did not pay much heed to the rather oracular words of the Malay, though he recalled it all afterwards, his attention now being taken up by some choice specimens of the sunbird family, hovering about the blossoms on the banks.

Ten miles or so farther up, and the boatmen pointed to the overgrown mouth of the little river of which they were in search.

Anyone unacquainted with the place would have passed it unseen, but it had been noted down by the doctor during one of his expeditions, as a place to be explored at some future time.

The men turned the head of the sampan towards the tangled mass of bushes and overhanging trees, and then, as they drew near, one of them rose in the prow, and drew the long heavy parang he wore, a sword-like knife much used by the poorer Malays for cutting back the thorns and canes that a few days' rapid growth led across their path; but the next moment he had lowered the weapon, and rested the point upon the edge of the boat.

"Someone has been here, master," he said; "a big boat has broken its way through."

"All the better for us," said the doctor, and instead of having to cut and hack right and left, the sampan passed easily along the tangled channel, the masses of huge water-lilies giving way before the boat, while, as they got farther on past the grown-up mouth, the river seemed to widen, and the route of the vessel that had passed before could be plainly seen in a narrow channel of leaf-sprinkled water.

"That prahu must have been along here, master," said the elder of the two Malays, thoughtfully. "No small sampan could have broken a way like this."

"So much the better," said the doctor again; but he grew more thoughtful, for the fact of a boat having been along this little river so lately seemed to rob it of a good deal of its mystery. He had hoped to find it completely unexplored, and here only that day someone had passed along.

It was, however, in its upper portion that the doctor hoped to find something to interest him; and after all it was not probable that the occupants of the prahu would be searching for gold.

Under these circumstances he set himself to examine the banks on either side, and his men steadily paddled on hour after hour, till a halt was made at an open part where they landed, and made a fire to cook the birds that had been shot on the way up. Then a fresh start was made, and all through the long hot afternoon the doctor sat back scrutinising most diligently the sides of the little river.

But it was always the same—one dense bank of verdure on either side, with the trees hanging over the river, and encroaching so that at last the stream was only a few yards wide; but by pulling the branches aside the boat could have been thrust in, to glide along under a natural arcade—the home of thousands of crocodiles, from monsters fifteen and twenty feet long to their spawn not many more inches.

It was a perfect paradise for a naturalist, and the doctor grew so much interested that he forgot the prime object of his visit, seeing nothing but birds and insects, to the exclusion of old gold-workings, though had there been anything of the kind it would have been completely hidden amongst the tangled, luxuriant growth.

It was growing fast towards sunset when the doctor was suddenly brought back to the matter-of-fact every-day life from a kind of dream about the wondrous beauties of some peculiar beetles he had captured and held beneath his magnifying glass, by a sudden exclamation from the elder Malay.

“What is it?” exclaimed the doctor, sharply.

“The prahu came no farther than this. See, master, we shall have to cut the branches now to get along.”

He pointed with his paddle, and it was plain enough to see that the water-weeds and lilies were unbroken higher up, and that some large vessel must have been turned here, for the aqueous growth was crushed to a much greater extent.

“There is a path there,” said the Malay, and he showed his employer the bank beaten down by footsteps, and that the bushes and trees had been cut away.

“Yes,” replied the doctor, “someone has landed there, but it does not matter. We have come to the fresh ground. Let’s get a few miles farther, and then we’ll rest.”

The doctor was so anxious to get on that no further notice of the marks of other travellers was taken, and with his spirits growing more elate as he went on, he watched the dense jungle on either side, and peered down into the black water as night came rapidly on, so swiftly indeed that they had not progressed more than a couple of miles before the darkness made a halt absolutely necessary.

The waterproof sheet made a good covering, and the night passed undisturbed, the rising sun being the signal for a fresh start; but the difficulties of the journey began rapidly to increase.

The stream that had been deep as well as swift seemed to have suddenly grown shallow, indicating by its noisy brawling, and sparkling over masses of rock, that the country was rising fast.

In fact, the course of the river was now between high escarpments of rock, the jungle and its dense masses of trees seeming to be left behind, the grasses that grew in patches amongst the chinks of the rocks being different in kind from that which tangled the jungle where it touched the water.

But in spite of the difficulties of the journey, the doctor was in ecstasies, and, regardless of getting his feet wet, he was constantly out of the boat to examine the shallow sands for signs of gold.

Volume Three—Chapter Three.

A Time of Trial.

Murad was startled for the moment, Helen’s act was so unexpected. Then a calm look of satisfaction crossed his face, and he smiled as he stood there, gazing down at the swarthy beauty, and folding his arms, he waited for her to speak.

“Do you wish to abase me more than this?” she said at last, in a choking voice.

“No,” he replied, calmly, “that will do. I meant to bring the proud English beauty to my feet. See, I have done so, and very much sooner than I expected.”

Helen felt that she had made a false move, and the blood ran back to her heart, as she crouched there, trembling.

“You have brought me to your feet,” she said softly. “Be satisfied, and spare me further degradation.”

“What do you wish me to do?” he said in a low, deep voice.

“Send me back home!” she cried excitedly.

“And what then—what of your father and the Resident? What of my position at the settlement?”

“No one shall know. I will keep it all a secret.”

"And you would risk all the remarks that your appearance would excite by going back?"

"Yes!" she cried passionately, as she thought of Mr Harley, and felt that he would take her to his heart even then.

"And you honestly believe that no trouble would follow?" said Murad quietly.

"I am certain of it!" she cried. "I tell you I would keep it secret."

"And I know better," he said contemptuously. "My good girl, do you think I am a child? If I let them at the settlement know of the step I have taken, your people would send for help, and my country would be invaded, my campongs burned, and after they had driven me out, they would take possession of my land."

"But I would not betray you."

"Pish! They would discover it for themselves. They think you dead now. Let them think that you had been carried off, and my days would be but few in my land."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried; "the English are not cruel."

"Oh, no," he echoed, with a derisive smile, "not cruel, only just. Look here, Helen, I have been gambling: I staked all I had, even to my life, to win you, and I have won. Now you ask me to resign my gains. It is ridiculous. How would it be—how does the matter stand? On the one hand, here is ruin to my place and people and death to myself; on the other hand, happiness and joy—the happiness of a gratified love, as I rejoice in my triumph over the woman who first made my pulses throb, and then trifled with my love."

Helen started to her feet and shrank away, feeling instinctively that she had as much prospect of finding pity from the tigers of the jungle as from Murad.

As she retreated from him he smiled with all the consciousness of his power, and rested upon one elbow, as he reclined upon the mats, watching her movements, a very idealisation of some glistening serpent, gazing languidly at the trembling victim that has been placed within its cage, ready to be stricken down at his good pleasure.

"There," he said, at last, "it is foolish to weary yourself and try to escape. I tell you it is impossible. You have now the skin and the dress of a Malay lady; why do you not adopt our ways as well? We are fatalists, as your people call us. When we see that a thing is to be, we take it as it comes, and do not murmur and strive against fate. You see now that it is your fate to be my favourite wife. Why should you strive against it like some dove that beats its breast against the close bars of its cage. Come," he continued, making a place for her by his side, "let us be friends at once, Helen. You do not wish to make me angry with you, I am dangerous then."

"Angry? With me?" she cried, her indignation asserting itself now, and her eyes flashed as they met his. "I do not fear your anger."

"And yet it is to be feared," he said quietly. "Ask one of the women here about my rage, and you will find that it may mean death. They fear it, and shrink from me when I frown."

For answer, Helen strove once more to tear open the door, and then she uttered a wild and piercing shriek, for, as silently as one of the tigers of his own jungle, Murad had gathered himself up and sprung forward, catching her by the arms, and the next moment he held her strained to his breast.

Helen's wild shriek was answered on the instant by one without; and Murad's face became less swarthy in his rage, as he loosed his prisoner and threw open the door, admitting the younger of the two Malay girls who had been Helen's gaolers, and who ran to the Rajah and flung herself upon his breast.

In an access of rage the Malay chief struck her across the face, and sent her staggering back, as he cursed her brutally for coming at such a time; and Helen saw how thin a veneer was the English upon the man's nature, which now asserted itself in all its native savagery as he bade the girl go.

"No," she cried, turning upon him in a patient, suffering way, displaying the strength of her weakness as she once more clung to his arm. "I do not mind your beating me," she said patiently. "I am used to that: but you said you would love me always; and I will not have this strange girl come between us."

"If you do not go—" he said hoarsely, and he bent down and whispered to her with a menacing look, and a touch at the hilt of his kris.

"I am not afraid," she said in the same low tone, as she clung to his arm. "You would not kill me; and you may beat me. I am used to that. I say I will not have anyone come between us and stand quietly by."

Murad's hand sought his kris, and his lips parted from his teeth, when he half drew the weapon from its sheath; but he mastered his savage rage as he thought of Helen, and spoke quietly and in slow, measured tones, evidently meaning her to hear and comprehend every word.

"Go," he said, "and you can tell the others this—I have no wife now but this lady. If either of you speak evil to her or annoy her in any way you die. I shall not touch you, but you will be taken to the river. Now leave me at once."

The girl shrank from him, and trembling in every limb, she tottered towards the door; but her attachment and jealous feelings still refused to be mastered, and turning back once more, she burst into a wild passion of weeping, and flung herself upon his breast.

“Go?” he cried angrily, and he repulsed her roughly. “You hear my words.”

He flung her away, and Helen saw her opportunity. Here was one who hated her, but might be made her friend; and as the girl staggered back from the violent thrust she had received, Helen caught her in her arms and clung to her.

For a moment the girl shrank away; but directly after she gazed wildly in her eyes, and then with an hysterical cry clasped her tightly.

“Stay with me,” whispered Helen. “I hate him! Pray stay and save me from him!”

The trembling girl seemed to grow strong as she found out more fully what her rival’s real feelings were; and as Murad angrily advanced she retreated with Helen to one corner of the room, uttering so wild and piercing a shriek that the Rajah stamped his foot with rage, and going to the door, threw it open and uttered a fierce command.

The result was, that four of the women with whose faces Helen was already familiar came running in, and Murad pointed peremptorily to the pair.

“Take her away!” he cried sharply, and the women seized Helen’s defender; but with a quick movement she snatched a little kris from within her sarong, and they fell back in alarm; while with flashing eyes she placed one arm round Helen, and gazed menacingly from one to the other, as if ready to strike at the first who should advance.

The women uttered loud cries and fled to Murad, who fiercely ordered them once more to separate the pair. No one, however, advanced, and he threw open the door and bade them go.

The women hurried out, glad to escape, and then the Rajah pointed to the open door.

“Go!” he said fiercely, and he glared wrathfully at the girl, who pressed her arm more tightly round Helen, and looked her defiance. “Will you go?” he said hoarsely; “or am I to have you torn away?”

“No one dare tear me away!” retorted the girl. “I shall stay with her, and no one shall hurt her while I’m alive.”

They spoke so quickly now that Helen could only gather a few words here and there; but she could make out how fiercely the girl was threatening to resist any attempt to separate them, even going so far as to present the point of her weapon at Murad, who shrank angrily away, and stood at last biting his lips.

“Will you go?” he cried at last, in a furious tone; and as he spoke he gazed from the girl to Helen and back again.

“No!” she cried fiercely. “I will stay with her. She shall not be your wife!”

Volume Three—Chapter Four.

More Treachery.

Murad took a step towards the girl, and whispered something which Helen could not catch.

Then, turning sharply round, he dashed the curtain aside, swung open the door, and passing through, they heard the heavy bang as the curtain waved to and fro, when Helen’s defender sank trembling to her knees, her eyes closed, and the little weapon with which, but a minute before, she was ready to menace the Rajah’s life, fell with a musical tinkle upon the floor.

The noise startled her, and she opened her eyes to gaze piteously at the fallen curtain, and ended by bursting into a passionate fit of weeping.

Helen let her hands fall upon the Malay girl’s shoulder, eager to speak her thanks, but hesitating, as she felt that it would be better to let the outbreak have its course.

In this spirit she waited quite patiently, listening eagerly though for the slightest sound without that should betoken the Rajah’s return; but all remained silent till suddenly the girl rose and turned upon her angrily.

“Why did you come?” she cried; “he loved me before he saw you. Go: you make me hate you, and I shall kill you for it if you stay.”

For the moment Helen felt angry. At such a time the girl’s want of reason was irritating; but seeing that she was almost beside herself with jealous grief, she advanced and laid a hand upon the weeping girl’s arm.

“You know I hate him,” she said gently, “and that I would give the world to get away.”

“Yes, yes, yes, I know,” sobbed the girl; and her anger gave place to a most effusive display of affection. “Yes, I know, but it is so hard to bear. He used at one time to love me so well, and now he is quite changed for the sake of you. Why do you not go?”

“Will you show me the way?” cried Helen, eagerly.

“The way?” said the girl.

“Yes; how to escape—to get back to my own people.”

"Do you really want to go back?" said the girl, looking at her searchingly.

"Yes, yes; oh yes," was the reply. "I'll give you anything to help me away. You shall be made rich, and I will care for you and love you like a sister, only save me from this man."

The girl fixed her great dark eyes upon Helen's, and seemed to be trying to read her thoughts.

"It is very strange!" she said at last.

"What is strange? That I should ask you to save me?"

"No," said the girl, dreamily; "that anyone should be able to hate Murad. He has been cruel to me, but I could never hate him, even though others have talked to me and tried to get my love. Hamet has loved me, he tells me, and that he is unhappy because I am cold; but I could never hate Murad, and the more cruel he is to me, the more he seems to have my love."

"But it troubles you that he should make love to me?"

"Yes," hissed the girl, fiercely. "It makes me mad."

"Then help me to escape; help me to get away," cried Helen, clinging to her passionately.

"And if I do he will kill me," sighed the girl.

"Then do not stay here," whispered Helen, glancing suspiciously at the great curtain, which seemed to wave to and fro, and moved as though some one were listening close behind.

"Do not stay?" said the girl, wonderingly.

"No. Let us escape together."

"But to leave Murad?"

"He does not love you now."

"But Hamet does; he would grieve. They would follow and kill me."

"No, no. You shall not be harmed," said Helen, excitedly. "I will protect you. You shall live with me."

"No," said the girl, sadly, "I could not go away and leave Murad. He is cruel to me, but I cannot be cruel to him. He would want me if I was gone."

"But you say he would kill you if you stayed?"

"Yes," sighed the girl. "He would kill me for helping you to escape if he found me out."

"Then come with me and let my people protect you," whispered Helen, excitedly. "Why should you stay here when I can give you a happier and better home?"

"Happier! better!" said the girl. "No; there is no life for me that could be happier when he is kind. There can be no better place than this."

Helen passed her arm round her, for there was something beautiful in the girl's faith and love for the tyrant who abused her affection at every turn; and the girl, feeling the unusual caress, turned to her lovingly.

"Tell me once again," she said, "that you really mean it—that you would be glad to go," and she looked searchingly in Helen's eyes.

"I would sooner die than stay," cried Helen, who had to repeat her words twice before she could make herself understood.

"Then let me think," said the girl, quietly; "let me think how it can be done, for we should like to live and be happy once again."

"As we shall be, if you help me to escape and come with me and share my home. Let us steal down to a boat as soon as it is dark, and then we can soon reach the great river by floating with the stream."

The girl smiled sadly.

"You forget," she said, "Murad's people will watch us, for we are prisoners now."

There was no doubt about this being the case, for door and window were securely fastened, as the girl showed with a smile, becoming very thoughtful directly after, and making impatient gestures every time Helen tried to draw her into conversation.

And so the day wore on, with the prisoner's heart sinking as she saw the approach of night.

It was just at the time when her spirits were at their lowest ebb that the girl turned to her suddenly and caught her by the arm.

"I have been thinking," she said, "and you shall go free."

She spoke in her own tongue, and Helen had great difficulty in comprehending her, but the peril sharpened her understanding; and by making the girl repeat her words, she arrived at a pretty correct interpretation.

"And you will go with me?" whispered Helen, eagerly.

"A little while ago I felt that I could never leave Murad; but he is cruel, and he loves me no longer now. I will go."

Helen's heart throbbed with joy, as she caught the girl to her breast and kissed her passionately, losing her though directly, for the door was suddenly opened, and they saw a group of four women standing there, evidently bearing food.

"Come and fetch it," said one of them to Helen's companion, for they did not attempt to enter the room.

The girl left Helen and went to the door, to return, bringing the materials for a respectable meal, returning again for water and palm wine, with vessels for drinking, and once more returning for the fruit that the women produced.

Helen was watching their movements intently and suspiciously, she hardly knew why, when suddenly, as the girl was taking a bunch of plantains from one of the women, another threw her arms round her neck and clasped her tightly, with the result that the others seized her as well; there was a slight struggle, the door was slammed to, and as Helen ran to it with throbbing heart, she heard the noise of renewed struggling, the excited angry cries of her poor companion, and these seemed to be dying away for a time, and then to suddenly end as if they had been stifled.

Helen Perowne was brave enough in her way; but the sounds of this struggle, the cries, and their sudden ending, coupled with the threats lately uttered by Murad, made her shudder as she turned, wet with the cold perspiration that gathered upon her face.

What did it mean—that sudden silence? Had they suffocated the poor girl, or had they slain her by some more sudden and deadly stroke?

Helen tried hard to maintain her composure; but her dread increased, and she tottered back to the mats that served her for a couch, to sink down, trembling in every limb.

It was a terrible ordeal, and the more she realised the horrors of her position the more deeply she regretted her conduct to Murad.

For evidently beneath his thin veneer of European manners the Rajah was a remorseless Eastern tyrant, ready to do anything—to sacrifice anything to obtain his wishes.

Unknowingly, or rather carelessly, and with her customary indifference, she had made this man her determined pursuer; and as she thought this, she turned faint, feeling that her position was hopeless in the extreme; and for the moment she felt as if she would go mad.

A violent flood of tears relieved her overburdened brain, and at last she sat up, thinking of her chances of escape, and wondering whether she had let her imagination run riot, and the girl was after all only in a fresh place of confinement.

She decided to take this hopeful view of the case; and feeling better, her eyes lit upon the food that had been brought in, and of which she partook, not so much from choice as from a belief in its being necessary for her strength, which she feared might fail her at any time, perhaps in the direst moment of her need.

Seating herself, then, beside the food, she was trying to eat, when the door was again opened, and one of the women entered quietly, bearing a lighted English lamp.

Helen eagerly questioned her respecting her late companion; but the woman either did not or professed not to understand, merely placing the tall lamp upon a mat on the floor, and hurrying away, seeming as it were to disappear in the gloom on the other side of the lamp, and directly after she heard the door close.

She sat listening, but all was very still. The sun had sunk, and the darkness was coming on so rapidly that she felt thankful for the lamp; and then she turned longingly towards the water and wine that had been brought to her, but which she shrank from touching lest they should happen to contain some drug.

Her thirst seemed to increase at the very sight of the drinking-vessels; and the more she tried wrench away her eyes, the more they sought the large native bottles and cups.

"I cannot bear it!" she panted at last, and bending down, she took the vessel containing the water, poured some out, and after tasting it suspiciously, with her throat growing parched with intense longing, she felt satisfied that the water was pure, and drank a long and hearty draught.

She set the cup down with a sigh of pleasure; and then her blood ran cold, for her sigh seemed to be echoed from out of the gloom near the door.

Murad was standing there, leaning against the doorpost, and it was evident to her now that he had entered when the woman brought in the lamp, and that he had been watching her ever since.

Trying for a Change.

The days glided rapidly by, and still Hilton and Chumbley remained prisoners. They were well attended to; their diet, though Eastern in character, was admirably prepared: they had wine and cigars, capital coffee, and an abundance of fruit, but no liberty.

The Inche Maida was either away, or else she had taken such deadly offence that she was determined to see her prisoners no more for the present, until they were in a better frame of mind as regarded her wishes.

The slaves who attended upon them were ready to obey their slightest wishes, running eagerly to fetch coffee or fruit, or a kind of sherbet which was *very* pleasant to drink during the heat of the day.

But there was, with all the attention, a strict watch kept, Chumbley noticing that there was always an ostentatious display of force as if to show the prisoners that it was hopeless to attempt to escape.

Armed men sat about outside the door, and from the window the prisoners could see other armed men sitting about chewing betel, or practising throwing the limbing—the javelin with a blade of razor keenness—which they hurled with such unerring aim that the least skilful would have been certain to strike a man at thirty yards.

But all the same, the hearts of the prisoners were set upon scheming their escape; and they sat and smoked, and made their calculations as to how it was to be compassed.

"I'm sorry I was so rough with the poor woman," said Hilton one evening, as they sat by the open window sipping their coffee, and gazing at the rich orange glow in the sky above the dark green foliage of the trees.

"Well, you were pretty rough upon her for displaying a remarkable feminine weakness in your favour," replied Chumbley.

"Well, rough or no, I'm tired of this," said Hilton. "It is evident that Harley is making no effort to find us out."

"Perhaps he is, but can't find the place. I've been trying hard to make out where we are."

"So have I, but I'm puzzled. One thing is evident; we are a long way from the river."

"So we cannot be at the Inche Maida's seat."

"No; I suppose this is a sort of private, lodge or hunting-box somewhere away in the jungle."

"Yes; a place of retreat in case of danger."

Then there was a pause, during which the prisoners sat gazing through the bars of the window at the glories of the sky, Chumbley disgusting his friend by continuously spitting.

"The Princess's home is on the right bank of the river," said Hilton, at last.

"Granted, oh! Solomon the wise!"

"*Ergo*" continued Hilton, "we are upon the right bank of the river."

"Unless her ladyship's dominions extend to the other side."

"Take it for granted that they do not," said Hilton.

"What then?"

"Why, we can pretty well tell where the river is."

"Where is it then?"

"Due north from where we sit."

"Humph!" said Chumbley. "Sun sets in the west. I'm looking at the sun, and the river, then, is straight away from my right shoulder?"

"Of course!"

"Then if we got out of this window, and walked straight through the jungle—which we could not do—we should come right upon the river?"

"Sooner or later," said Hilton. "Then all would be plain sailing."

"Don't see it. No boat," said Chumbley, spitting again.

"Why, my dear boy, we should journey along with the stream till we came to some campong, and then cut adrift a boat and escape in that."

"But suppose the owner objected?"

"Knock him down with one of his own cocoa-nuts, or your fist. You're big enough, Chumbley."

"All right, I'll try," was the reply; "but that isn't the difficulty."

"No, of course not. You mean how are we to get away from here?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I have a plan at last."

"A good one?" said Chumbley, spitting through the window again.

"No, for all my good plans that I have invented turn out to have a bad flaw in them. This is the poorest of the lot, but it seems the most likely."

"Well, let's have it," said Chumbley coolly; "not that I feel in any hurry to get back to duty, for I am very comfortable here."

"Hang it all, Chum, I believe you would settle down as soon as not."

"I don't know. Perhaps I would. But how about this plan?"

"It is simply to wait till about one or two in the morning, when everyone will most likely be asleep, and then to climb up the side of the room here, and force our way through the thatch."

"Go on," said Chumbley, spitting again, and making his friend wince.

"Then we could climb along the ridge of the roof till we get to the farther end, where there is a big tree resting its boughs over the place. Once there. I think we could get down."

"And if we could not?"

"We'd get down some other way."

"Why didn't we try that before?" said Chumbley; "it is quite easy."

"Because it was so easy that we did not think it worth trying."

"Humph!" ejaculated Chumbley. "I've been thinking out a plan too, which perhaps might do as well. I was going to tell you about it to-night, only oddly enough, you proposed this."

"What is your plan?" said Hilton, yawning.

"Well, you see, I thought of getting out by the roof, breaking through the walls, and cutting the bars of the window; but they neither of them seemed to fit, so I tried another plan."

"And what was that?"

"It seemed so much better to go through the bottom, so I have been at work at the bamboos."

"Where—where?" cried Hilton, excitedly.

"Take it quietly, old fellow, or you may excite attention," said Chumbley, spitting through the window. "Well, the fact is, I've been at work night after night, when you were asleep, upon the bamboos under my bed."

"And you have cut through them?"

"Yes; through two of them, so that one has only to pull my bed aside, lift the two pieces of wood—"

"Chumbley!" ejaculated Hilton, joyously.

"Hullo!"

"Why, I've been giving you the credit of being ready to settle down here in the most *nonchalant* way."

"Yes, I saw you did. That's why I chiselled away so, to get through those bamboos."

"While I was asleep?"

"While you were asleep," said Chumbley, spitting vigorously.

"Ah, my dear fellow, I shall—"

"Hold your row. Light a cigar, or they'll be suspicious."

Hilton obeyed without a word, and Chumbley went on:

"So when you are ready we'll pocket a table-knife apiece, fill our pockets with portable meat of some kind, and then be off."

"Why not to-night?"

"I don't see why not," replied Chumbley, coolly; "I'm ready. It will do you good—a bit of a scamper through the jungle, even if we get caught."

"No scoundrel shall catch me alive."

"I say, old man, don't talk as if the Malays were fly-papers and you were a pretty insect."

"Don't be absurd," said Hilton excitedly. "Shall we try to-night?"

"Well, no; let's leave it till to-morrow, when we can devote the day to storing up cigars and food; and then if they don't find out the hole I have made, we can slip through and make for the river."

"But suppose they find out the hole you have made."

"Well, then we must try another plan: your way through the thatch."

"Yes, of course. But, by the way, old fellow, I wish you would drop that habit you have just taken up of spitting through the window."

"Certainly I will," said Chumbley, coolly; "but don't you see, old fellow, I've had to get rid of a lot of bamboo chips, and that was the only way I could destroy them. They're awfully harsh chewing, by the way."

Hilton looked at him with a kind of admiration.

"And to think that I've been abusing you for your indolence!" he cried.

"Didn't hurt me a bit," said Chumbley. "Go it. I don't mind."

That night and the next day seemed as if they would never pass. Every time a native servant entered Hilton felt sure that he had some suspicion about the loosened bamboos, and it seemed as if his eyes were directed towards the pile of mats upon which Chumbley slept.

But at last, after a false alarm of the Princess coming, the night fell, and with a beating heart Hilton set about filling his pockets and a handkerchief with provisions for the journey, Chumbley seeming all the while to be plunged into a state of lethargy.

"Come, Chum," whispered Hilton, at last, "be stirring, man."

"Heaps of time yet, my boy," replied the other. "Lie down and have a nap."

"Will nothing stir you?" whispered Hilton, wrathfully. "Good Heavens, man, rouse yourself!"

"Shan't. I'm resting. There's heaps to do when we start, and I want to be fresh. Lie down."

"Hang it, don't speak as if I were a dog," cried Hilton, sharply.

"Have the goodness to lie down and rest yourself, my dear boy," said Chumbley in a polite drawl. "It is of no use for us to attempt to stir till the fellows are all asleep, so save yourself up."

Hilton obeyed, lying down upon the matting, and in spite of his excitement, he felt a strangely-delicious drowsy sensation stealing over him, to which he yielded, and the next moment—so it seemed to him—Chumbley laid a great hand over his lips, and whispered:

"Time's up!"

He rose to his knees, to find that it was intensely dark, and saving an occasional howl from the forest, all was perfectly still.

"I've got the bamboos up," whispered Chumbley, "and you are going first, because I can then hold your hands and lower you softly down. Don't speak, but do as I bid you."

Hilton felt ready to resist his companion's autocratic ways, but he obeyed him in silence, Chumbley lowering him through the hole to the open space below the house, the building being raised some eight feet above the ground upon huge bamboo piles, as a protection from floods and the prowling tiger.

The next minute there was a faint rustle, a heavy breathing, a slight crack or two, and Hilton received a heavy kick.

Then Chumbley dropped to his feet.

"I got stuck," he whispered, as he took his friend's hand; "thought I should not have got through. Now then, the river lies straight before us, under that great star. 'Ware guards and tigers, and we shall be safe."

It was intensely dark beneath the house, and but little better as they emerged from the piles upon which it was built, to stand with the dense jungle before them, impenetrable save where there was a path; and they were about to step boldly forth, when something bright seemed to twinkle for a moment between them and the stars, and by straining their eyes they made out that straight before them were the misty-looking forms of a couple of their Malay guards.

In Time of Peril.

With eyes wild and hair dishevelled Helen Perowne sat crouched together as far from the Rajah as her means would allow.

"Why, Helen," he said mockingly, and with a gleam of triumph in his eyes, as he half reclined against the bamboo wall, "how beautiful you look!" He made a movement as if to clasp her in his arms, but she sprang up with a cry of horror.

"What folly!" he said, laughing as he slowly changed his feet. "And you will not drink—you are afraid that I shall try to poison you. Don't be afraid. Why should I now? I love you too well. When first you began to woo me—"

She burst into a piteous fit of sobbing, and then turned upon him her eyes full of misery and despair.

"That makes you more handsome!" he cried, excitedly. "Be angry with me; I love it! I will say that again. When you first began to woo me—"

It had not the intended effect, for Helen remained silent, watching him with dilated eyes, as if he were some tiger about to make a spring.

"I say when you first began to woo me," he continued, "I resisted for a time, for you are only a white woman, and not of our blood or our religion; but I felt at last that you had made me your slave, and once my love had turned to you, fate told me that you would be mine, and I gave way to my passion. Then you led me on till I declared my love, when you professed to cast me off, and I accepted the words; but they were words only. Fate said that I was to take to myself a wife from the invaders of my country, and do you think I was going to let the opposition of your friends, as you did, stand in the way?"

He waited for her to reply, but she remained watchful and silent.

"I knew all along," he went on, evidently to provoke her to speak, "that you only professed to reject me, and that you were waiting, as I was, the time when you would be mine; and though I grew daily more impatient, I was ready to wait for my reward. At last the time has come. Look at me well, my wife, for such you are; even the priests have studied, and found that a prince of my race was to marry a woman fair as the morning light."

He took a step forward, and as she shrank back with a cry of horror, he stopped and laughed.

"Why do you shrink away, little wife?" he said. "The time has passed now for that, and you should cling to me, and pay me for my patient waiting and my brave deed. But you were afraid of the water and wine, as if I should poison or drug you. Why should I? You are here—my wife—in my home amongst my slaves. It is foolishness to think that I should give you poison to drink—to you who love me so well. See here!"

He walked quickly forward to where the wine was placed, and Helen watched him keenly as he poured out a cupful, smiled at her, and drank it slowly to the last drop.

"Now," he said, smiling, "will you drink without fear? I will pour you out a cup. No; I will use this from which I drank. It is only your husband's, and you need not mind."

He poured out a fresh cup of the palm wine; but as if from clumsiness shook the native bottle that contained the liquid. Helen did not perceive it; but the wine as he partook of it himself was clear; now it was thick and discoloured, a fact that would have been seen at once in a glass.

She still kept aloof from him, with her mind actively at work, seeking some means of escaping from her enemy's hands, for she could not conceal from herself that appeals and violence would be equally in vain.

She came to the full endorsement, then, of previous thoughts—that her sole hope of escape depended upon artifice: her womanly cunning must be brought to bear. She felt that she had mastered Murad before; why should she not now—by seeming to accept her fate? He would, she argued, doubtless submit to her wishes if she showed a semblance of accepting his suit, and in this spirit, as he pressed her once more to partake of the wine, she began to parley with him.

"I do not drink wine," she said.

"But you must be faint," he urged. "You have only drunk water; you have not eaten."

"Then I will eat," she said.

"May I seat myself, and eat with you?"

She paused for a moment, for her nature fought against the subterfuge she was about to practise; but he was keenly watching her, and she motioned to him to take his seat upon the mats.

"When you are seated," he said, with a smile of triumph playing about his lips.

She hesitated for a moment or two, and then sat down, Murad following her example, and contenting himself, as she seemed ready to start away, with placing the wine-cup at her side, and seating himself opposite.

"That is better," he said, smiling. "Now make me happy by letting me see you eat."

Every mouthful seemed as if it would choke her, and her heart beat wildly as she thought of her unprotected state; but she battled bravely with her feelings, and spoke quietly, answering the Rajah's questions, and striving all the while for strength and courage to carry out her designs.

As for Murad, he was perfectly triumphant in his way. The victory was his; and with all the pride of a weak man at his success in bringing the handsome English beauty to her knees, he laughed merrily, making Helen shiver as she saw the wild excitement in his eyes, and listened to the compliments he paid to her beauty.

"I like you the more for your brave resistance," he said; "and most of all for your cleverness and wisdom. You see that it is of no use to fight, so like a wise captain you surrender."

He laughed again, and kept his flaming eyes fixed upon her.

"You shall be my queen, Helen," he said, talking in a quick, excited way. "You shall help me to fight all my enemies, and drive them out, till all the country round is mine, for you are Malayan now, and your people will have to go. I shall not slay them. No: they will find they have no position here, and they will go as they came; but you will stay. You will not wish to leave me, my queen. You will not wish to be white again. But you have not drunk your wine. Come: you must drink, Helen; it is my cup, and I wish to drink again."

She took up the cup and held it to him, Murad taking it with a bow and smile, holding her fingers within his pressed against the side of the vessel, and keeping them prisoned there.

She did not shrink, but sat motionless, her hand becoming deathly cold, and the dank perspiration gathering upon her brow.

"No," he said at last, with a smile; "it is not fair. You must drink to me. See!" he continued, raising the cup to his lips, and holding it there for some moments. "I drink to your happiness—a toast you English people call it."

She watched him narrowly, and saw that he did not drink, merely held the cup to his lips, and then slowly let it down to the level of his breast, carefully wiping his lips before holding out the cup to her.

"Stay," he cried, "I must fill it up again;" and taking the native bottle, his hand shook a good deal as he refilled the cup. "Your presence agitates me," he said. "See how my hand trembles. It is all for love—the love you taught me to feel."

Helen trembled with horror; and never had her heart reproached her in all her past more bitterly than at this moment. It was retribution, and she felt it cruelly.

"There," he cried, touching the edge of the cup again with his lips, "drink from that, Helen, my love, my wife, as an earnest of the kisses you press upon these lips, for I will not force them from you; they shall come full and freely as your gifts. Forced kisses are from slaves, and I can command them when I will! I want your warm, true, freely-given English love, and in return I will worship you, and make you a queen as great as your own, far over the seas. There, take the cup and drink. Yes, you must—you shall drink. No, no," he cried, laughing in a harsh, strange way, "I do not command, I beg and pray."

He had risen now, and was bending down over her with the wine, and in her horror and fear of his presence she was ready to shriek aloud. His hand grasped her arm as he pressed the cup towards her. It was with no lustful caress, but with a spasmodic, furious grasp to save himself from falling as the cup dropped from his hand, making a great patch upon the soft brown matting that was spread with sweets and fruit.

He recovered himself though directly, and stood upright, but kept on muttering angrily and gazing about him in a wild, excited way. His eyes looked fixed and dilated, while his hands were extended as if feeling about for something to grasp.

Helen gazed at him in horror, and she shrank more and more away as Murad kept on muttering in the Malay tongue before sinking down heavily and then letting his head drop as if it were much too heavy to bear.

She stared, believing it to be some *ruse*, but a heavy, stertorous breathing set in, and the Rajah sank lower and lower, evidently in a heavy stupor, while now all became confused and misty before Helen's eyes; and as, like a flash, the thought passed through her brain that after all the water that she had tasted had been drugged, a deathly sickness overcame her, and she sank back insensible upon the mats.

Volume Three—Chapter Seven.

Light in Darkness.

When Helen Perowne came to her senses it was some minutes before she could realise what had taken place, and she lay there motionless, staring up at the bamboo and palm-leaf roof that looked dim, and weird, and strange, as she saw it softly illumined by the rays of the lamp; while there above her was one soft round patch of light glowing amidst the darkness, and reminding her of the nights when she had been ill at Miss Twettenhams', and a night-light had been set to burn in a shade.

"Where am I?" she asked herself: for the past seemed gone.

Then all at once she seemed to hear, coming, as it were, out of the mental mist wherein she wandered, a dull, low, long-drawn breathing, and she rose to her elbow, to see there, lying with his face turned to the lamp, and not two

yards away, Murad, apparently watching her, for his eyes were widely opened and staring in her direction.

Her heart began to throb violently, and, cautiously watchful, she rose slowly to her knees, supporting herself with her hands, as she felt how horror-stricken and weak she was; and it was only by a great effort that she found herself able to stand.

She was glad, however, to sit down again, to allow the sensation of giddiness that oppressed her to pass away. And now she fully realised the fact that the staring eyes before her, in which the light of the lamp was strangely reflected, were fixed and blind to what passed around, their owner being plunged in a deep stupor-like sleep.

It was some time before she could really believe this to be a fact; but when she did realise her position it gave her courage; while, as she tried to recall what had passed, she wondered how it had all come about.

Her common-sense soon told her that she had fainted entirely from fright, and that her suspicion concerning the water being drugged was ill-founded; while, on the other hand, as she gazed at Murad, her ideas gathered force, and she fully believed that her enemy had fallen into the trap that he had laid for his victim, and she wondered how long it would be before he awoke.

Helen's suspicions were correct. Murad had had some little experience in the management and usage of the vegetable narcotics of the jungle, and believing from old experiments he had made that he could drink with impunity the clear wine from the top of the prepared vessel, he had, to disarm her suspicions partaken thereof, leaving the strong, thick portion for his victim, taking care to agitate it at the time of pouring out.

He was, however, wrong, for the narcotic he had used was a particularly strong preparation, and the clear portion at the top of the bottle contained ample quantity of the poison to overcome him in the fancied moment of his triumph, leaving him prone at his prisoner's feet.

The dizziness passed off; but for a few minutes the girl felt that she dared not stir for fear that at the least motion on her part her persecutor might awaken; and in this spirit she remained for some time, listening to the heavy breathing, and watching intently, as if fascinated by the dark eyes that at times seemed gazing into hers.

At last, however, she gained a little more courage, and cautiously made a step or two towards the door.

Then she paused and listened, and gazed at the prostrate figure, fancying that she had detected some slight movement; but satisfying herself at last that Murad still slept, she went once more, step by step, her heart palpitating wildly, till she reached the door, when a louder inspiration than usual made her turn sick with dread, and she had to cling to the framework to keep from falling.

Finding, however, that Murad did not stir, she once more gained courage; and rousing herself for the effort, she drew aside the heavy matting curtain with cautious hand, tried the fastening of the door—growing more bold moment by moment as she strove to get it open—but all in vain. The handle would not stir, and it seemed to her that there must be a great bar across on the outside, making prisoners of both her and her captor.

It was not until the utter hopelessness of her effort dawned upon her that she gave up her task and turned to the window.

Here her efforts were equally vain, for the grill was formed of stout bamboos secured with ratan cane, bound at the intersections, and so strong, that without a powerful edge-tool even a stout-hearted man might well have given up the task in despair.

Helen's delicate fingers, then, failed even to shake the bars; and at last, thrusting her arms through, she clasped her hands on the other side, and pressed her fevered brow to one of the openings that the soft night air might breathe upon it, and there she remained, alternately praying for help and listening to the Rajah's heavy, stertorous breath.

A couple of hours must have passed like this, and the silence was terrible. There was at times the hoarse roar of a tiger in the jungle, and the Rajah now and then muttered some words in his own tongue; otherwise there was the regular breathing of the sleeper, and the dull thud—thud, thud—thud of the prisoner's palpitating heart.

All at once there was a sharp exclamation and an uneasy movement which sent Helen's blood bounding through her veins.

The time of peril had arrived then; and she thrust her arms more fully through the bamboo trellis, meaning to enlase her fingers firmly, and cling there to the last.

It was a strong position which she had accidentally taken, and it now dawned upon her that it would need a tremendous effort to dislodge her from her hold.

Here, then, she clung as the uneasy movement continued, and it was not for some time that she dared turn her head to look where, to her great relief, she found that Murad had only slightly changed his position, and was still sleeping heavily.

How long would this last, she asked herself, with a shiver of fear; and then, in the reaction after the horror of a few minutes before, when she fancied her enemy was waking, she became weak—so weak that she sobbed hysterically, and almost hung from the bars of the window, for her legs refused to bear her up.

But she recovered after awhile, and feeling stronger, satisfied herself that Murad was still sleeping heavily, and then stood gazing out at the darkness of the night.

The dense foliage made it seem blacker; but here and there the rays of a star penetrated to where she was, and seemed like a promise of hope. The faint perfume of flower and leaf made the soft, moist air odorous and sweet, and there was a delicious coolness that seemed to give strength to her enervated frame.

Every now and then came the ominous cry of some wandering tiger following the narrow jungle paths, and at times there were strange, mysterious sounds, evidently arising from the forest depths, and to which she could give no name, but which sent a shudder through her frame, as she thought that ere long she might be wandering there in the darkness, running the risk of an attack from one or other of the fierce beasts that haunted these shades.

But as these thoughts crossed her mind, she glanced back at where the sleeping figure of Murad lay full in the light of the lamp, and she felt that she would sooner risk the danger to be incurred by wandering through the jungle than remain another hour beneath that roof.

It must, from the time that seemed to have elapsed, have been near morning when, as she stood there with her weary head pressed against the bamboo barn, the cry of a tiger sounded very close at hand, followed a few minutes later by a low, rustling noise, as if the creature were forcing its way through the dense undergrowth towards the house.

This ceased, and then went on again and again, till, forgetting the peril that threatened her in the room, Helen strained her eyes to try and make out the long, lithe, striped form of the advancing tiger, which appeared to be approaching with the greatest caution the window where she stood.

It was so unmistakably making for where she stood that Helen felt a chill of horror run through her, thinking that sooner or later the fierce beast would make a tremendous spring, and perhaps force its paws through between the bars and seize her as its prey.

So horrible was the impression that once more she felt fascinated, and gazed down with starting eyes, her enlaced fingers clutching more tightly, and her whole being as if under the influence of a nightmare.

Then, all at once, the rustling noise ceased, and she stood listening intently for the next approach or for the final spring.

But even if she had known that the next moment the approaching tiger would launch itself through the air and seize her with its claws, she could not have stirred, for it seemed to be her fate.

The silence was awful: so perfectly still seemed everything that the breathing of Murad grew painfully loud, and the throbbing of her own heart more pronounced.

"Is he asleep?" said a low voice just then from out of the darkness where she stood, and Helen's heart gave a great bound; for in the voice she recognised the tones of the Malay girl, who had that evening been dragged from her side.

For a few moments the reaction was so great that Helen could hardly speak; and when at last she could master her emotion, her dread was still so great that the words would hardly come.

"Speak low!" whispered the girl; and cautiously and beneath her breath, lest their common enemy should awake, each proceeded to make known her position to the other.

By degrees Helen learned from the girl, who spoke in a bitter, half-distant way, that she had been shut up in a room by herself, and threatened with death, but that she had immediately set to work to escape, and had succeeded by climbing up, and tearing a hole through the palm thatch, forcing her way out, and sliding afterwards down the steep slope, and falling pretty heavily amongst the bushes below.

She was not much hurt, however; and after lying still for a long time to make sure that she was not heard, she had slowly forced her way through the dense undergrowth, making a long circuit so as to approach the window of the room where Helen was a prisoner without exciting attention.

"You must speak lower," she said, "or he will wake;" and then Helen told her of the drugged wine—or, rather, of her suspicions that the wine was drugged.

"And he drank it!" cried the girl, excitedly. "Ah, then, that is right," and her whole manner changed. "He will not wake up till long after sunrise. I know what that poison will do. I drank of it when I was first brought here, and I slept for one whole day. We need not be afraid of him then, but we must mind not to waken the other people near."

She ceased speaking, and Helen heard a loud rustling and panting noise, and a few minutes later a dark face rose to a level with hers, and she clasped the Malay girl towards her and began to sob.

The girl kissed her through the bars, there being just space enough for their faces to approach, and then, with an eager look at the sleeping figure, she whispered that it was time to act.

"But what shall we do—what can we do?" whispered Helen.

"You said you wanted to leave him, and that you would take me back with you to your own people. Will you do so now?"

"Oh, yes, yes," whispered Helen, excitedly; "make haste and let us go!"

"But are you sure that you wish to leave him?" said the girl, dubiously.

"Oh, yes—yes—yes!" cried Helen, so eagerly that the girl uttered a warning "hush," and then apparently satisfied, bade her be still while she tried to make a way to her.

For answer Helen stood listening, while the girl seemed to climb upwards and sidewise, standing with her feet resting upon the bars of the open window; and for some time there was a low tearing and rustling noise, as if an effort was being made to cut through the bamboo and cane-woven wall.

This went on for some time and then ceased, to Helen's great relief, for Murad had several times moved uneasily, and it seemed to her that the noise had awakened him.

There was a slight rustling then, and the Malay girl came back to her former position.

"I cannot do it," she whispered. "It would take strong men with parangs, and I am only a weak girl with a kris."

"Can we not escape, then?" panted Helen, whose heart sank.

"Yes; but not that way. It must be through the roof, for the attap is only soft and the strings thin. I think I can manage to cut through there."

As her words left her lips they both clung there as if paralysed, for, uttering a hoarse gasp, Murad struggled to his feet and staggered towards them with an angry cry.

Volume Three—Chapter Eight.

A Faithful Ally.

The alarm was not of long duration, for it soon became evident that Murad was still under the influence of the powerful narcotic. He did not see either of the other occupants of the room, but staggered here and there for a few moments, and then sank heavily once more upon the mats, placing his head in an easy position, and falling into a heavy sleep, his breathing sounding deep and regular to the trembling girls.

"We need not mind," said the Malay girl at last. "He cannot hear me. I will climb up."

The bars of the window formed a ladder for her ascent, and she clambered slowly up till her feet were resting upon the topmost bar. Then there was a rustling and cutting noise, and every now and then a dull pat, as of something falling into the bushes below.

It was a terrible position for Helen, who, unable to assist, could only listen and keep her eyes fixed on Murad, whom she momentarily expected to see arise wrathfully and call for help to seize the brave girl working so hard without to obtain freedom for both.

Then, as the Rajah still remained breathing heavily, another form of dread attacked her; she felt sure that some of the guards or people must hear this loud rustling noise, so that it was with an intense feeling of relief that Helen heard the sounds cease. Then there was a louder rustling as of someone drawing herself up, and directly after the Malay girl climbed down into the room, Helen clasping her tightly in her arms.

The girl freed herself hastily and went across to where Murad lay sleeping, bent down over him, gazing steadily in his face, and then turned with a bitter laugh.

"I have said good-bye to him, so now let us go. If I look at him again I shall never be able to leave. Let us escape."

"But how?" exclaimed Helen, helplessly.

"How?" said the girl. "Why, as I came in. I have opened the way," and she pointed to the ragged hole in the palm thatch.

"I could not climb up there," exclaimed Helen, with a look of helplessness and despair in her countenance; "it is impossible!"

"You white people!" cried the girl—"you are poor, and weak, and helpless! But come, you must go. Murad will soon waken, and what will you do then?"

The mention of that name and the prospect of the awaking seemed to nerve Helen to the effort she was called upon to make; and in answer to a fresh demand made upon her by her companion, she declared her readiness.

"I will go first," said the girl, and with the nimbleness of a cat she seized the bars of the window, went up them like a ladder, and with an agility that made Helen, as she watched her in the dim light shed up there by the lamp, look upon her movements as almost miraculous.

Drawing herself quickly up, she passed through the hole in the attap roof, crawling right out; and directly after, having turned, Helen saw her leaning through.

"Now, come—quick!" whispered the girl. "Step up the window-bars as I did, and then give me your hands. You shall not fall; I will hold you."

Helen made a couple of weak, ineffective trials to climb up and reach her friend, but sank back, and was ready to burst into feeble tears and give up in despair; but Murad uttered some angry words and threw out one arm, which fell

heavily back upon the floor.

The noise electrified Helen, who darted to the window-bars, and how she managed she hardly knew, but she climbed up, caught spasmodically at the Malay girl's hand, at the bamboo rafters, and partly by her own effort, partly by the girl's exertion, was dragged up through the palm-leaf roof, and sat with her companion holding on tightly to the steep slope.

Here she rested, panting and trembling, so that the girl did not make any further effort for a few minutes, and even then it was Helen who proposed that they should move, placing her lips close to the other's ear, and asking wildly what they should do next.

For answer the girl climbed over her, made Helen move slightly, and then, seating herself with the legs through the hole, she took off the sarong worn veil-fashion over her shoulders, and twisting it tightly, tied it to the one Helen wore, making of the two a strong silken rope, one end of which she secured to the trembling prisoner's left wrist.

"Now," she whispered, "I will hold you by this. Let yourself slide softly till you touch the bars with your feet, and then climb down. Afterwards hang from the sarongs, and I will lower you as far as I can."

Helen drew a long, deep breath, trembling the while, for the height and position in which they were seemed to her to be awful!

But she did not shrink now; she felt committed to the desperate enterprise; and holding on by the tough palm-leaves, she lowered herself down the steep roof, and then clung to the woodwork with all her strength, as her feet were suspended now over the darkness, and she sought foothold for them with desperate haste.

But for the steady strain upon her wrist she would have fallen; but this encouraged her to renewed effort, and after a few trials, and just as she began to feel that her task was hopeless, her right foot touched and rested upon one of the bars, and taking a fresh hold, she stepped down, slipped, was held by the tight tension of the silken rope, saved herself, and the next minute stood panting, with hands and feet sustained by the stout bamboo trellis of the window.

Here she paused for a few moments, when once more it was Murad who startled her into action, and she lowered herself down till she was hanging by the sill of the window, seeking for some support for her feet, her companion jerking the sarong sharply to urge her on.

But Helen had exhausted herself by her efforts, and could do no more. She tried once feebly, but there was no result; and to make matters worse, the Malay girl was now straining the sarong, as if afraid that she would fall.

There was a faint cry, a slip, the sarong was held tightly, and Helen fell with a jerk that seemed to drag her left arm from the socket. She swung for a moment, and the silken rope was lowered so rapidly that she seemed to be falling. Then she did fall with a crash amongst the bushes, what seemed to her to be an immense distance, though it was only some half-dozen feet, and she lay perfectly still, feeling that she was terribly hurt.

She was half stunned by the fall and the excitement; but her companion climbed down lightly, and bent over her in the darkness.

"Quick!" she whispered. "Someone must have heard you fall? Are you hurt?"

"I don't know. Not much," faltered Helen, as she struggled to her feet, the girl meanwhile hastily rolling the sarong round Helen's arm, catching then at her hand, and half dragging her through the tangled bushes, whose thorns checked them, tearing their garb, while every now and then they had to stoop and creep beneath the trees.

In this way they had made some fifty yards towards safety, when a fierce snarling growl, which they both knew well enough to be that of a tiger, sounded away in front; and almost simultaneously there was the report of a gun, then of another, and lights could be seen in the direction from which they had come.

"Which is it to be," said the girl, hoarsely, "Murad or the tiger? Say which you will choose, for they will either of them kill us without mercy?"

Volume Three—Chapter Nine.

Another Escape.

"The Inche Maida need have someone to drill and discipline her men," whispered Chumbley to his companion, as, after walking up and down for a few minutes, they saw the two Malays, whose duty it evidently was to guard their prison, light their pipes and then stroll away, their course being for a time indistinctly made out by the faint glow of one of the bowls.

Mutually regretting that they had not made an attempt to escape sooner, since they were finding the task so easy, Hilton led the way, going cautiously step by step upon their blind quest of a path which should lead them to the river.

That such a path would exist they felt pretty sure, the river being the great highway of the land; and paths were so few, that they were pretty certain of its being the right one if they should hit upon a track.

In spite of their efforts, though, first one and then the other leading, no path was found; and at last, in utter despair, after being driven back again and again by the density of the jungle, they were compelled to sit down amongst the bushes edging the forest to wait for day.

It was a grievous disappointment after escaping from the house and evading the guards. They had hoped to be miles away towards the river before daybreak, whereas now the chances were that they would hardly place to their credit a hundred paces even if they avoided the guards.

Day seemed as if it would never come, and yet so persevering had been their efforts that the first streaks of dawn began to appear in less than an hour after they had seated themselves in what proved to be a very fair hiding-place; and almost as they made their first step to reconnoitre, there was a flash of orange and gold in the sky.

Chumbley pressed his companion's hand, pointing as he did so to what was evidently the pathway they had sought for; and after a glance round they were about to step out into the open, and then run as quickly as they could into the shelter, pushing rapidly on to make the best of their way into the depths of the jungle.

Hilton gave his companion a glance, and they were about to start off when a couple of spear-armed Malays took up their position on one side of the Inche Maida's house, a couple more starting up from beneath a tree where they had been sleeping, and so near that the officers must have nearly trodden upon them as they passed.

Had the two young men not sunk down in their hiding-place they must have been seen, and it was evident now that the Inche Maida's followers watched a part of the night, after which they lay down to sleep, and rose again at daybreak to continue their guard.

Regrets were unavailing, and it was as useless to wish themselves back in their comfortable prison, there to rest till night, when they could have easily got away with the knowledge they possessed.

Hilton uttered a weary sigh as he lay there trying to devise some means of escape; and meanwhile the sun rose higher, lighting up the dark places beyond where they lay, and showing them more and more that the slightest movement meant being seen and offering themselves as marks to the Malays' spears.

They exchanged glances and lay perfectly still, with one of the Malays coming to and fro past them as he kept guard, and so near, that had he looked in their direction at the right moment, he must have seen them.

A couple of hours had passed away when the outcry that the fugitives had been expecting arose, the Inche Maida herself giving the alarm and furiously bidding her people to join pursuit.

Quite twenty well-armed men darted off through the opening into the jungle, the Princess following them at the end of a few minutes with half a dozen more of her followers, leaving the palm and bamboo edifice apparently deserted, and the way free.

"Now is our time, Chum!" whispered Hilton, and cautiously rising, they began to look for another path—one that would lead them to the water by a different route.

They ran round the house twice, and then gazed at each other in despair.

There was but one path, which led right to the opening in which the house was built. All around was impassable jungle; and the only way to escape was to follow the Inche Maida and her men.

The place was a regular trap, and could have been defended by a few resolute fellows against hundreds if there was an attack.

"What's to be done, Chum?" said Hilton.

"Go in and hide somewhere, and wait till night."

"With those women to tell the Princess where we have hidden ourselves!" said Hilton, angrily, pointing to a group of half a dozen women standing in the doorway and watching their movements.

Chumbley made a few steps as if to go to them, when they scuttled off like so many rabbits in an English warren; and there were but two courses open to them—either to follow their would-be pursuers, or to calmly go back and wait for the Inche Maida's return.

"It will be taking trouble for nothing to go after them," said Chumbley, wearily. "Let's go back to our room and order the women to bring us some breakfast."

"What? And give up without making an effort?" cried Hilton. "I'd sooner die!"

"I wouldn't. But all right," said Chumbley. "I'm with you; but we may as well be armed."

He ran into the house, and as he expected, had no difficulty in finding a couple of krisses and spears, one of each of which he handed to his friend; and then they struck boldly into the jungle, following the path taken by their enemies hour after hour; and, though momentarily expecting to hear them returning, continuing their course in the most uninterrupted way.

It was always the same; a dense wall of verdure to right and left; tall trees shutting out the sunshine, and the greatest care necessary to keep from falling into one or other of the great elephant holes.

At last they came upon a place where the pathway forked; and after a moment's hesitation they chose the path to the right, that to the left being the one most likely to bring them nearer to their friends, and, therefore, probably the one their pursuers had taken.

In fact, hardly had they gone a hundred yards down the way they had chosen, before they heard voices across the jungle, evidently those of their returning pursuers.

This lent fresh wings to their feet, and they hurried on, finding to their dismay that the enemy had turned into this path, and were now following them fast.

It was a race for liberty, perhaps for life; and whither the path led they could not tell. Whenever they paused for a moment to listen, they could hear the voices of their pursuers; and at last, panting, streaming with perspiration, their faces bleeding from contact with thorns, they glanced at each other, when, by mutual consent, they made another effort. The path took a turn, and Hilton uttered a cry of joy, for at the end of a long green tunnel there was the brilliant sunshine upon the river.

This put new life into them; and racing onward, they reached the water's edge just as a couple of Malay fishermen were securing their sampan to a post.

The sight of the weapons, and the threatening words used by the desperate fugitives, silenced any opposition the fishermen might have made; and as the two officers sprang aboard, the men loosened the rope, took their paddles, and the boat was round the bend of the river and out of sight before the Inche Maida's followers reached the water's edge.

Before night the Residency island was in sight.

Hilton had been very silent for some time, but at last he spoke:

"Chum, old fellow," he said, "I've been thinking about what we are to say."

"Hilton, old fellow, I've been thinking the very same thing."

"It would be too ridiculous to say that we had been carried off by a woman."

"We should be roasted to death!" said Chumbley.

"But she ought to be punished."

"Can't go and carry sword and fire into the woman's home because she took a fancy to you."

"What are we to say, then? I dare not own to this affair!"

"I swear I won't!" said Chumbley.

"Then what is to be done?"

"The only thing seems to me to be that we had better say we were carried off by the Malays."

"Which is a fact," said Hilton.

"And we were taken to a place that we had never seen before."

"Another fact," said Hilton.

"And kept prisoners."

"Which is another fact."

"I think that's best," said Chumbley. "It would be horrible to go and take revenge upon this woman."

"But she deserves to be well punished."

"Well, we are punishing her," said Chumbley, "by coming away, and leaving her in a horrible stew, for she is safe to imagine that we shall go back with a company, and destroy her place. Besides, she will never dare to show her face at the settlement again."

"Well, let the matter rest for the present," said Hilton. "Only let us thank our stars that we have escaped."

"To be sure!" said Chumbley, with a sigh of relief. "Poor woman, I should not like her to be hurt, she behaved so well; and—Hurrah! there's Harley! Row, you ruffians—row! There—to that landing-stage!"

Then, as the men, who were in a great state of dread as to whether they should be allowed to depart, tremblingly placed the boat alongside the bamboo landing-stage, Hilton sprang out, Chumbley following, after placing some silver coin in the men's hands, and sending them rejoicing away.

"What's that?" cried Chumbley, as he caught part of a sentence and the Resident's hand at the same moment. "Miss Perowne missing?"

"Yes; carried off, I suppose now," said the Resident, between his teeth. "The same brain must have contrived your absence, though for what I don't know, unless it was for ransom."

Hilton and Chumbley exchanged glances. "Only one brain here could have plotted this," cried the Resident, as he mastered the fact of his friends having been made prisoners in some out-of-the-way place; "and the brain was that of

the doubly-dyed, treacherous scoundrel who has all along professed to be our friend. I always suspected it: Helen Perowne is a prisoner in Rajah Murad's hands."

Volume Three—Chapter Ten.

Hamet.

The disposition on the part of Helen Perowne and her companion seemed to be to trust the beasts of the jungle sooner than the Rajah; and after a few moments' pause to listen, they went cautiously on, with the cries of the great cat-like creature that they knew to be in their neighbourhood seeming to grow more distant, as if it had been driven off by the noise and firing at the house.

It was terrible work that flight; and had she been alone Helen would have given up in sheer despair, for every atom of growth in the jungle seemed to be enlisted in the Rajah's service, and strove to check the fugitives as they fled. Great thorns hooked and clung to their clothes; ratan canes wound across and across their way, tripping them up, so that again and again they fell heavily; while the dense undergrowth rose up constantly like a wall of verdure, as impenetrable as some monstrous hedge.

Streaming with perspiration, panting with exhaustion, and ready to give up in despair, Helen struggled on, nerved to making fresh attempts by the courage of her companion; but at last the jungle was so dense that any further effort seemed like so much madness, and they paused to rest, Helen sinking down amidst the thorns and leaves, too much exhausted to move.

The Malay girl did not speak, but stood leaning against a tree-trunk, listening for tokens of pursuit, but there was not a sound; and by degrees it dawned upon them that the Rajah's people had taken alarm at the noise, and then, seeing nothing, hearing nothing more, they had quietly returned to their rest; for the probabilities were that they would not venture to disturb the Rajah, who would sleep on in his stupor perhaps till mid-day.

After a time the girl laid her hand upon Helen's shoulder.

"We must try again," she said; and with a weary sigh the fugitive rose and staggered on, following her companion as she tore aside the canes, pushed back thorny growth, and utterly regardless of self, kept on making a way for Helen to follow.

There was a strong display of kindness in her manner, but it was not unmingled with contempt for the helplessness of the English girl, who had to trust entirely to her for every step of their progress.

Just at the very worst time, when they had again become entangled in the wild jungly maze, the Malay girl stopped once more to take breath; and then making an angry effort to free herself from a bramble-like growth that was tearing her sarong into shreds, she uttered a cry of joy, for she found that she had broken through quite a thorny hedge of growth, and was now standing in a narrow pathway, evidently the track made by elephant, buffalo, or other large creatures of the jungle.

Her cheery words aroused Helen to fresh exertion; and following the track, painful as it was, and full of crossing strands and canes, they got on for the next two or three hours pretty well, when they seemed to have descended into marshy ground through which the track led.

Here they found a fresh difficulty, for if the Malay girl had had any doubt before that they were in an elephant path, it was made evident now by the series of great footprints, every one of which was a pitfall of mud and water, the custom of these huge beasts being to step invariably in the tracks left by those that have passed before, believing them to be indications of safety; and the result is that in a short time the path becomes in a wet soil one long series of muddy holes.

It was along such a way as this that Helen and her companion struggled on till the sun had risen and the rich shafts of orange and gold came pouring through the dense foliage above their heads.

With the sunrise came light and hope. The sombre forest seemed to be less depressing, and when they had struggled on for another hour, until the heat began to be steamy, a brighter light shone through the trees ahead, and they awakened to the fact that they were near the little river, whose banks they at last reached, to lie down beneath the spreading branches of a huge tree. The boughs formed a screen from everyone who might be passing in a boat; and here the Malay girl produced some food which she had had the foresight to bring; and this they ate, watching the rapid, sparkling stream, whose path through the jungle was all sunshine and light, while that of the fugitives had been one of gloom.

As they sat there resting, they now and then directed their attention to the stream, gazing up and down as far as their eyes would reach in search of danger; but sparkling water, blossom-burdened trees, and the occasional glint of some brightly-plumaged bird darting from side to side, was all that met their sight.

They both meant to be watchful, and as soon as they were rested to once more continue their flight, but the exhaustion produced by their unwonted exertions proved to be too much for them, and as the heat increased they both fell into a deep sleep.

Helen and her companion had been slumbering heavily for several hours, ignorant of the flight of time, and in these brief restful moments thoughts of peaceful days had come back to both; while in the sunshine beyond the tree that formed their shelter birds flitted here and there, the brilliant armour-clad beetles winged their reckless flight, making

a whirring hum as they dashed over the stream. The surface of the river was flecked with the rising of the bright scaled fish, and what with the varied greens and the beauty of the blossoms that made the sides of the little river quite a garden, all looked peaceful, and as if trouble could not exist upon earth. But danger was near, for two of the Rajah's boats came slowly up-stream with their occupants parting the leaves with bamboo poles, and peering beneath on either side in search of the fugitives; while, in utter ignorance of their proximity, the wearied girls slept on.

A tall, fierce-looking Malay, in a brilliantly-tinted sarong, stood in the prow of the boat nearest to the fugitives, and he was so indefatigable in his efforts to examine every foot of the way, that it seemed impossible for the girls to escape his search.

Nearer came his boat, and still those the crew sought lay insensible to danger, and with Helen's thoughts far back in the past of her pleasant days with her friends at the little settlement. The tall Malay used the light pole he held with the utmost skill, and parted bough after bough, raising this one, depressing that, until it was down in the swift, pure water.

Every now and then he gave some short, sharp order to the men who paddled the boat, so that they sent it in closer or forced it back, giving him abundant opportunity for seeing anyone upon the bank; and in this way they approached the great tree beneath whose umbrageous foliage the two girls slept.

The boat was sent close in, and the swarthy face of the Malay peered between the branches, which he moved with the pole, so that over and over again they helped to shelter those who were sought, and at last the sharp order was given to back out from among the branches; but the moment after the leader rescinded his order and seemed to be desirous of searching more, for he raised a broad-leaved bough, held on by it, and looked in once more beneath the shade, shot with brilliant rays, and with flies dancing up and down in one broad band of sunshine.

That broad band of sunshine shone right athwart the Malay girl's face, and as the searcher saw it a grim smile of satisfaction played for a moment about his lip, and then left him stern-looking and calm.

"Go on," he exclaimed, in his own tongue, as he loosed the branch whose leaves hid the sleeping girl from sight, and the boat went forward, the Malay peering back for a moment with his great opalescent eyeballs rolling as he looked up and down the great tree, as if fixing it in his mind with the surroundings on either side of the stream. After this he went on in the same matter-of-fact way, pressing the branches aside and examining his bank of the river for quite an hour longer, when the leader of the other boat, which was well in advance, hailed him, and proposed that they should give up the search as of no avail.

The other searcher made a little demur, when the other became more pressing.

"They could not have wandered up so far as this," he said; and the tall Malay reluctantly acquiescing, the two boats were turned, a man placed a paddle over the stern for steering purposes, the other paddles were laid in by the weary rowers, who, leaving the boats to descend the swift stream, settled themselves in easy attitudes, pulled out their betel boxes and leaves, and each man, after smearing a sirih leaf with a little paste of lime, rolled up in it a fragment of the popular betel-nut, and sat back with half-closed eyes, chewing, as if that were the be-all and end-all of existence.

The boats sped rapidly down-stream, past the glorious panorama of tropic vegetation spread on either side: but it was not noticed once save by the tall Malay, who sat back in the prow with his bamboo pole balanced in his hands, lazily peering out of his half-closed eyes.

As they approached the huge tree, beneath whose shade the two weary girls lay resting, the Malay's dark eyes opened slightly, as if he were again carefully observant of the place. Then they half-closed once more, then quite closed, and he seemed to go fast asleep.

Then the two boats rapidly glided down with the current and disappeared.

The sun, which had before been shining straight down upon the river, had gone westward, and had begun to cast shadows across the foaming stream, when once more a boat appeared, but only propelled by one man, who, armed with a long pole, stood in the stern, as he kept close in under the trees, and thrusting the pole down in the bubbling water, forced the little vessel along at a rapid rate.

He did not look either to right or left, but aimed straight for the great tree, and even then passed it, but only to alter the course of the boat a little, and let it glide back right beneath the branches and close in shore, where he silently secured it, and then stepped out to where the Malay girl still lay sleeping.

He stood looking at her for a few moments before kneeling softly down at her side, when, with a light, firm touch, he placed one hand upon her right wrist and the other upon her lips.

The girl started into wakefulness, and would have shrieked, but the hand across her lips stayed her. She would have seized the kris with which she was armed, but her wrist was pinioned.

She gazed with fierce and angry eyes straight into her captor's face, and thus for some moments they remained till he raised his hand.

"Well," she said, "you have taken me."

"Yes; at last," he replied, in the same low voice as that in which the captured girl had spoken.

Involuntarily the Malay girl's eyes turned towards her companion, but she closed them directly, believing that Helen

had not been seen.

"Yes, she is there," he said, in a low whisper. "I saw her before I saw you."

"And now you are going to drag us back to Murad?" said the girl, adopting his tone. "How proud Hamet must feel now that he has become a slave-catcher!"

"I did not say I was going to take you back to Murad," he said, laughing. "Do you wish me to take you back to have the kris?"

The girl shuddered, for she knew that this would be her fate; but with true Eastern spirit she recovered herself.

"What matter?" she said, indifferently. "I do not mind."

"You do mind," he said; "and you want to live."

"Yes: then let me go," she replied.

"No; I was sent to take you, and I have found you."

"But you do not mean to take me back to Murad?" she cried, angrily.

He laughed again.

"It is for you to decide," he continued, in a low voice. "I, Hamet, have loved you long now—ever since Murad grew tired of you and cast you off. You know it."

"Yes," she said, sullenly, "I know it. You have told me before; and if I had told the Sultan he would have had you slain."

"Both of us," said the tall Malay, coolly. "But now we are away from him and free. Will you listen to me?"

"I must," she said, scornfully. "I cannot help it."

"Yes; you could help it," he said; "but you will not. I am obliged to take this opportunity, and I do, for I could not bear to see you hurt."

"And yet you came to seek me?"

"Yes, and to save you. Two boats have been searching for you this afternoon, but only my eyes saw you. Had it been any others, you would have been in Murad's power by now."

"Did you come and see us sleeping?" she said, eagerly.

"Yes. How else could I have known that you were here waiting to be caught?"

"And now that you have caught me," she said, indifferently, "what does Hamet mean to do?"

"Is it Hamet, Murad's officer—or Hamet your friend?"

"How can I tell?" she said, indifferently. "You are a catcher of slaves, and you have taken two. Are you happy?"

"No," he said, earnestly. "Make me happy."

"How? Tell me what are your plans?"

"To save you if I can; but either you become my wife, or you go back to Murad. My orders are to take you."

The girl remained perfectly silent for a few minutes, during which the tall Malay watched her intently.

"If I say I will be your wife, and go with you now back to your place, will you let her go free—where she will?" said the girl.

"Yes," he said, eagerly. "I will not see her; she may go where she will."

The girl hesitated for a few moments, and then tried to rise, but the Malay held her tightly by the wrist.

"I shall not try to run," she said, scornfully. "Loose my arm."

The Malay hesitated, gazing full in her eyes. He then tossed the girl's arm lightly from him.

"I will trust you," he said; and then he looked on curiously, as the Malay girl stooped softly over Helen, and just brushed her hair with her lips so gently that the sleeping girl did not stir. Then, turning to the Malay:

"Are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes: quite. I saw you before; but I did not want to capture you for Murad. Now, is it to be as I say? Will you come?"

The girl glanced once more at Helen; then placing her hand in that of the Malay, she let him lead her a few paces along the bank, and assist her into a seat, where, taking his place in the prow, he silently loosened the boat, guided it

softly past the boughs, so that there was not even the rustle of a leaf; then, letting the pole dip into the water, he gave one powerful thrust, and the sampan darted out into mid-stream, and then rapidly glided out of sight, just as the shadows were deepening across the river and an orange glow began to tinge the surface of the leaves.

Volume Three—Chapter Eleven.

Through the Wilds.

Helen woke with a start just as the boat disappeared round the curve at the end of the reach, and her first movement was towards where her companion had lain down.

At first she could not believe that she was alone, but sat waiting for the girl's return, believing that she had awakened first, and had gone for a short distance to try for a better path; but as the minutes sped, and the darkness would, as she well knew, soon return, a strange sensation of horror began to trouble her, and she started to her feet, and began to search around in various directions, even going so far as to call in a low voice.

She dare not go far for fear that her companion should return and find her absent, so she kept making little excursions here and there where the denseness of the jungle was not so great, and then returned to where she had slept.

Parting the boughs on either side, she then crept as near to the river as she could, so as to look up and down stream, for what purpose she could not tell, though it seemed as if an instinct led her to gaze at the highway by which her companion had departed.

It was now rapidly growing dark, and the feeling of depression and alarm rapidly increased. So thoroughly frightened did she become at last that she would gladly have called for help, but her common-sense warned her that such a proceeding would only bring down her enemies upon her if they were in hearing; and at last, with her horror of her loneliness increasing fast, and a feeling of dread that some savage beast of prey had seized upon the Malay girl gradually overmastering her, she sank upon the earth, weeping bitterly, helpless as a child, and asking herself if she dared face all those she knew again, and whether she had not better die.

How that night passed Helen never knew. Sometimes she sank into a weary kind of stupor, full of troublous dreams, from which she started awake with a sense of horror, and a full belief that some terrible creature was about to spring upon her. At times too, as if to carry out this illusion, she listened with beating heart to the distant howl of some wandering beast, or to one or other of the mysterious noises heard during the night in the primeval wilds.

The darkness seemed as if it would never end, and the rushing river, as it sped on like a stream of ink full of stars' reflections, hissed and writhed, and at times lapped the bank upon which she sat as if it were a huge serpent seeking to make her its prey.

This idea suggested the loathsome monsters that she knew would haunt the hot, steamy jungle close to the river side; and with starting eyes, when some low rustle was heard amongst the leaves, she tried to pierce the darkness, believing over and over again that she saw some lithe, undulating reptile gradually approaching her; and at such times it required all her strength of mind to determine that it was but a mere fancy, and as unreal as the images of fierce creatures that she more than once believed that she saw coming out of the jungle.

Then her busy brain reminded her of other and more real perils of her position—the more dangerous from their insidious nature and approach. Depressed in spirit as she was, she could not help recalling the accounts she had heard of the deadly fevers, and the certainty of their attacking anyone who passed the night upon the bare earth.

Still, it would only mean death at the worst, she thought, in a weary, despondent way; and her misery was so great now that she felt ready to give up her very life sooner than fall again into Murad's hands.

Then her thoughts flew to Harley, with whom she seemed to associate any hope that she might have of the future; and for a time she would brighten up, and contrast her present position with that of some few hours back. She was a prisoner then, and in terrible peril; now she was free, and the chances were, she hopefully told herself, that she might fall in with some party sent in search of her, for she would not believe Murad's version of her disappearance to be true.

It seemed to her as if the morning would never come, and the first herald of its approach was a dank, chilling breath that came to her laden with the mist of the river; and as she sat and shivered she felt that her clothes were saturated with the heavy dew, and longed now for the coming of the sun with its warm, inspiring beams and hopeful light.

Her teeth chattered, and her limbs ached as the day broke. She had been awake for quite a couple of hours; and the weariness and oppression that troubled her was now supplemented by a throbbing headache, which was at times almost more than she could bear.

As the sun sent his beams glancing through the jungle, Helen rose painfully to her feet, gladly seizing the bough of a tree to cling to and support herself till the giddy sensation that oppressed her wore off.

And now, in place of the chill from which she had suffered, she began to burn; hands, cheeks, temples seemed as if they were on fire; there was a misty unreality in the waving branches of the tree as it overhung the river; and as she stood there, trying to master the giddiness that oppressed her, she felt as if this were only the continuance of one of the disturbed dreams that had haunted her during the darkness.

Then the fit passed away almost as suddenly as it had come; and trying to shake off the wearisome lassitude that

oppressed her, she began to move forward along the slightly-beaten track that ran onward a few yards from the edge of the river, one evidently made by the wild creatures that from time to time came down to drink, or made the banks of the river their home.

It was an arduous journey, for she had constantly to stoop down to enable her to pass beneath the interlacing boughs and parasites that crossed the path in all directions; but still she progressed, sometimes strong, and hopeful, more often wearied by lassitude, and at times compelled to cling to the branches as she struggled on, her head reeling, her eyes blinded by pain, and the feeling of unreality coming on more strongly with each attack; till at last she went on, forcing her way through the jungle in a state of wild delirium, muttering incoherently as she staggered on.

A blind kind of instinct seemed to keep her to the savage track near the bank of the river, and the same strange instinct led her from time to time to lie down in some convenient place to lap the cool, fresh water from her hand, and bathe her burning cheeks and brow.

As the day wore on and the heat increased, Helen's journey became to her a blind kind of dream. She had a sort of instinct as guide that she must get farther away—struggle on at any cost, in spite of heat, weariness, and the delirium that robbed her of her reason; and staggering forward with the hands bleeding that beat back the thorns and parasites enlacing her path, sunset still found her at the task.

How long this lasted Helen could not tell. She had a sort of memory of always hearing the rushing liver, and of sometimes lying down to bathe her face and drink. She knew, too, that she was in pain, and that the thorns cut her feet and tore her clothes; but pain and suffering were as nothing so long as she could struggle on.

Then a feeling of anger came over her at the Malay girl's desertion, for this was a new light in which she viewed her absence; and at last she toiled on till the trees seemed to come to an end, and it was only her weary torn feet now that were hindered by low, thorny, interlacing bushes. These, too, at last almost came to an end; and she seemed to be climbing, slipping, and falling over rocks that sloped rapidly down to the river. Sometimes she had to clamber right away, because the rocks towered up above her head and became impassable.

Then once more she would be slipping and falling lower and lower towards where the river foamed, and flashed, and gurgled, plashing over stones, rushing over masses of rock, but ever singing a pleasant kind of music to her ear, for it seemed to be her friend and guide.

It never seemed to occur to her confused brain that in place of going down the river towards civilisation, she was painfully climbing up towards the mountains, where the river had its rise in the wildest parts, in a district only inhabited by the Sakais—the aborigines of the country—or as they were generally called, the hill-men.

This was nothing to her, for her blind instinct led her to struggle on till, as in a dream, she saw the help that she had believed would come.

Her brain was more beclouded than ever, but she had some instinct of what she ought to do, and that was to make signals.

Then she blindly struggled on towards that help, grew faint, and her power left her. She fell, and lay moaning on the rocky earth; struggled up once more to continue her efforts to reach friends, but in vain; her power seemed to leave her now for good, and she sank down unable to rise again, her next recollection being that she was lying back upon a rough couch, with a familiar face bending over her, and then all was mist.

Then she was back at the old school, and in trouble with her instructresses for insisting upon going out upon a hot day with insufficient protection to her head. She was feverish and slightly delirious, and the doctor had been sent for. How familiar his voice sounded and how cool and pleasant his hands were to her heated brow; and she lay back there wondering why Grey Stuart did not come; why it was so long before a letter came from her father in the Malay peninsula; and then her head began to throb, for she had had, she felt, a terrible dream about having joined him there and been seized and carried off, as she had read in books of hapless maidens being abducted from their homes. It seemed so real that terrible dream, that she could picture the face of the man who had dragged her away.

Then mist once more, and a sort of awakening, as if sunlight had come through the mist, and she was in the garden with the Reverend Arthur Rosebury, who looked strange in his long coat, as he stooped to pick her flowers, and handed one to her that had a shape like a cup; and he said to her "Drink—drink!" and in her dream she seemed to drink, expecting to find that out of that flower-cup she would drink honey, while this was intensely bitter; and it was not a flower-cup, but metal, and it was not the Reverend Arthur Rosebury who offered the cup to her, but someone else; and while she was trying to listen who it was, for she could not see, all became silent once again, and blank, and she knew no more.

Volume Three—Chapter Twelve.

Doctor Bolter's Spirit.

Gold! What ideas that one word opens out—what magic it contains! But credit must be given to Doctor Bolter for the fact that it was no sordid love of the yellow metal that prompted him to search for gold.

He wanted it for no luxury; he had no wealthy man's desires to quell; all he wished was to make that grand discovery that would prove the Malay Peninsula to have been the Ophir to which King Solomon's ships came in search of treasure; and of this he wanted ample proof, such as he could lay before a committee of learned men. How was it to be obtained?

Doctor Bolter asked himself this question a dozen times over, but no answer came. He asked the question as he stood there up to his knees in water, examining his pannikins full of sand and gravel, which he took from the bottom of the little river, where it now displayed all the characteristics of a mountain stream.

He tried several pannikins full, scooping up the sand and gravel from likely places, and after picking out the larger stones, washing carefully till nothing remained after the water had been drained off but pure sand.

This he would examine in the full light of the sun, seeking in vain for little water-worn nuggets or specks and scales of gold; but for some time his efforts were unsuccessful; and they went on higher and higher, the shallowness, and the difficulties of the journey increasing at every stride, till, trying at a spot where the rapid stream swirled round the end of a great mass of stone, the doctor washed a pannikin of sand, and then uttered a grunt of satisfaction, for there at the bottom, glittering in the sunshine, were dozens of tiny specks of gold mingled with the grit.

"Plenty like that, master, the farther up the stream we go," said the chief boatman. "It comes out of the mountains where the wicked spirits live."

"Indeed," said the doctor, sarcastically; "then we must go up and see the wicked spirits. Do you think they will be at home?"

"It is very dreadful, master, and we shall all be killed! They send down little specks of gold like that in the water; but if we went up to try and get the great pieces stuck in the mountain side, they would smite us, and our people would see us no more."

"Well, we will risk that," said the doctor. "Go on."

The Malays sighed, and looked piteously at the doctor, whom they considered as dangerous as a spirit if not obeyed; for they knew he had strange medicines, and a lightning apparatus that sent sparks through them, and made their hands hold tightly by a couple of handles. Yes, he was a wonderful and dangerous man that doctor, whom nothing seemed to hurt, and they felt compelled to obey him.

They plied the paddles, then, sending the sampan through the sparkling water, till a few minutes after, when there was a loud grating noise, for they were aground.

The Malays sprang out, and wading and lifting the boat, they dragged it on into deeper water, jumped in and paddled on again, but only to get once more aground; and this occurred for a few times, after which the paddles had to be set aside, and the men waded and dragged the boat to a standstill.

The doctor had found gold in small quantities, and that proved gold to be there, but nothing more, and he rubbed his ear with a vexatious movement.

He knew that there was gold in the little streams that came down from the mountains, and probably there was a great deal more there in the mass. But that did not prove this to have been the place visited by Solomon's ships, and he was as far off the goal as ever.

"One thing is very evident," muttered the doctor, ill-humouredly, as he made a vicious blow at and missed a teasing fly, "Solomon's ships never came up this river, and we can get no farther without walking. Here, drag the boat under the shelter of that rock, and let's have a feed and a rest. The sun is unbearable!"

The men eagerly drew the boat over the stones, amidst which the pellucid water trickled and sparkled, placed it well in the shadow of a towering mass of rock, and then, in the comparative coolness, a good meal was made, after which first one and then the other dropped off to sleep.

The sun was setting when the doctor awoke from a dream of being somewhere undergoing a punishment for his sins by being buzzed at by flies that he could not knock off his face and ears.

He felt annoyed on seeing how the day was spent; but a little consideration told him that the men were almost knocked up by their exertions, and that they would be the better for the rest.

"Well," said the doctor, "how are we to manage now? Will the stream grow deeper higher up?"

"No, master," replied the Malay; "the boat can go no farther. We must walk."

"Humph! and carry the provisions?" said the doctor.

"Yes, if the master wishes to go up to the mountains."

"Why, you are afraid, Ismael!" said the doctor.

"Yes, master, we are both afraid; but if he says we must go, his servants will follow him right up where the spirits dwell. Look—see," he whispered. "There is one waving its hands to us to tempt us. Don't—no, don't look, master, or you may die."

The second Malay threw himself flat in the bottom of the boat, and covered his face with his hands.

"Well, I've seen worse things than that," said the doctor, grimly. "Why, it's a woman; and she's coming this way."

"The spirits come in all shapes from the mountains to tempt people," said the trembling Malay. "Now, they are tigers, now they are crocodiles, and sometimes women and men."

"Ah, the women are the worst kind of spirits," said the doctor—"especially," he added to himself, "if they are middle-aged and jealous of their husbands. Here, get up, sir; don't lie there; you're crushing my specimens. That's only a Malay woman."

The figure was struggling slowly along, the rugged, rock-strewn bank of the stream making her passage very arduous, for the little river was running now in the bottom of a ravine like a huge rift in the mountain side. The rocks towered up at a swift angle, and a traveller would have found the best road to be decidedly in the bed of the stream.

The woman ashore, however, evidently preferred the dry land, and kept on picking her way toilsomely from rock to rock, now descending into some rift, and anon climbing forth once more into sight, and more than once she seemed to fall.

She was quite a couple of hundred yards away still, and the doctor watched her approach with growing interest, feeling no little compassion for her, as he saw that she was evidently footsore, and struggled towards them in a weary, halting manner, that grew pitiable as she advanced.

At last the piled-up rocks grew evidently so difficult that the woman toiled slowly down to the bed of the stream, where the doctor saw her stoop and scoop up the sweet, cool water with her hand, evidently to drink with avidity. After this she made an effort to continue her course, but she seemed to totter and sink down upon a stone at the side of the stream, waving her brown hand once more as if for help.

"Poor thing!" said the doctor, stepping out of the boat into the shallow water, but only to be seized by the two Malays.

"No, no, master," they cried together; "you must not go. It is a spirit, and it will kill you!"

"Let go, you silly, superstitious fellows!" cried the doctor, wrenching himself free. "Women are very dangerous creatures, but I think I shall get back safe."

Then, to the horror of his two men, he waded up the stream to where the native woman sat back, half reclining against the rock, with her feet washed by the running water.

As it is well known, when once the sun is below the horizon, the twilight is extremely short in the tropics; and the fast-coming darkness was deepened by the depth of the rocky ravine, so that as the doctor waded carefully on to avoid a nasty fall, the figure of the woman in her gay plaid sarong was beginning to look filmy and indistinct enough to make anyone of superstitious tendencies doubtful of the reality of that upon which he gazed.

But the doctor was made of too stern stuff to be troubled in this way, even after the promptings of his companions; and wading on, with the water feeling deliciously cool as it plashed musically about his feet, he noted that the brown face looked fixed and strange, the lips parted, revealing the black, filed teeth, and such an air of exhaustion displayed in the eyes, that he hurried his steps.

"What is the matter?" he said, in the Malay tongue; but the woman did not reply, only raised one hand feebly and let it drop.

Black, brown, or white, it was the same to Dr Bolter. Here was a patient asking help in her mute way; and taking her hand, he quickly felt her pulse.

"No fever. Exhaustion," he muttered, softly, laying her farther back, so that after dipping some of the cold water in the cup of his spirit-flask, and adding a few drops of some essence, he could trickle it gently between the sufferer's lips.

She made an effort to swallow, and did so, uttering a low moan the next minute, followed by a piteous sigh.

"Drink a little more," he said, in the Malay tongue; and she obeyed mechanically, as he held the silver cup to her lips. "Poor girl," he continued, to himself, "her feet are cut and bleeding, and she has hurt herself with falling—Here! hoi! Ismael! Ali!"

The rocks echoed his cry, and the two men approached tremblingly.

"Come along, you stupid fellows!" he cried. "It is nothing to be afraid of;" and after a few more angry admonitions the two boatmen came up and helped to carry the insensible girl down to the boat, when, a snug place close by in the rocks having been picked out, the sufferer was placed upon a roughly-prepared couch formed of the doctor's overcoat and his waterproof sheet; then a macintosh was laid over her, and she seemed to fall off into a heavy sleep.

"That keeps us here for the night," said the doctor; and being hungry, a fire was lit, and a capital little dinner of preserved game and fish prepared, of which all partook, and then made preparations for passing the night.

Volume Three—Chapter Thirteen.

Medical Aid.

Doctor Bolter visited his patient two or three times, waking up with the greatest of regularity every two hours for the purpose, and administering a few drops of a cordial that he always carried wherever he went, it having wonderful qualities of its own, so the doctor said, and being competent to cure almost every disease, but smelling very strongly of brandy.

His patient slept heavily, and she was still sleeping as the doctor's coffee was ready just before sunrise.

"Humph!" he muttered; "it's a precious good job my wife isn't here, or she'd be as cross as two sticks, for the poor thing is a wonderfully handsome girl in spite of her black, filed teeth, and dark skin. Poor lassie! how she has scratched herself. Why, her feet are cut and swollen and full of thorns. I'll bet ten pounds to twopence she's a runaway slave."

There was no one to take the bet, and the doctor went on:

"Poor lass! she has put me in a fix. I can't take her back with me, because nothing upsets Harley more than having to deal with the domestic institutions of the Malays; and if they get under the protection of the British flag a slave is a slave no longer. Then, too, there is Mrs Bolter. Bless that woman! what a pity it is that she is of such a jealous disposition.

"Tut, tut, tut! Hang the girl! why didn't she run to someone else? It's a pity she doesn't wake, though, for a cup of coffee would do her good.

"Humph! Yes, she's a very handsome girl," muttered the doctor, thoughtfully. "What a pity it is that they can't leave their pretty white teeth alone, instead of disfiguring them like that, and—Bless me—how strange! Where have I seen this girl before?"

He stood gazing down at her very thoughtfully, but his memory did not serve him.

"It must have been at the Inche Maida's, and that makes it worse, for we don't want to offend her—Ah! that's right," he said aloud in Malayan.

"How do you feel?"

For answer the girl, who had just opened a pair of large lustrous eyes, gazed at the doctor at first in a frightened way, and then caught his hand in hers, kissed it passionately, and held it to her breast.

"Oh, come, I say, my dear, this won't do!" cried the doctor. "What the dickens do you think Mrs Bolter would say if she saw it? There'd be the prettiest row under the sun. Now, then, be calm, and lie still. You shall have a cup of coffee, and then I'll extract some of the thorns from your feet, or you'll be regularly crippled."

There was a fresh burst of sobbing here, the girl striving to speak, but her sobs choked her utterance.

"There, there, there," said the doctor, kindly, "don't cry, my poor child; you are safe now, and I'll take you back to the station in spite of Harley and Mrs Bolter herself. Hang the slave customs and all who practise them, I say! Now, my dear," he added, in Malayan, "loose my hand and I will get you some coffee."

He tried to withdraw his hand, but the girl clung to it the more tightly.

"No, no, Doctor," she cried; "don't leave me, pray!"

"What? The deuce!" exclaimed the little man, starting. "How the dickens did you know I was a doctor? I say; I know your voice; who—"

"Don't you know me again, Doctor?" she cried, passionately, and cutting short his speech.

"Know you? What—why?—It is? No. Yes: Helen Perowne!"

The poor girl burst into a frantic hysterical fit of crying.

"Why, my poor darling! my dear child! my poor little woman!" cried the doctor, raising her head to his breast, and holding her there, kissing her again and again as the tears ran down his ruddy face. "My poor little bairnie! This is dreadful! There, there, there, my dear, you are quite safe now," he continued, patting her and caressing her as a father would a favourite child. "But there; what a milksop I am; crying like a great girl, I declare, when I ought to shout *hooray!* to think I have found you safe, if not quite sound. Why, my dear child, Perowne will hug me for this. Poor old boy, he has been half frantic."

"But, Doctor," she sobbed, "they will catch me again, and drag me back to that dreadful place. Look here," she cried, with a mingling of pitiful appeal and angry indignation, and she held out her scratched and torn brown hands, and then turned her face and showed her teeth to him. "I have been cruelly used. They made me look like one of his wretched wives, so that I should not be known."

"But who—who did all this?"

"Murad, and I have been kept a prisoner here at a dreadful place, deep in the jungle, where I saw no one but his wretched creatures. Oh, Doctor, Doctor, kill me, or I shall go mad!"

"Kill you? of course I won't, my dear. The dog! the scoundrel! the smooth-faced hypocrite! I'll blow his brains out! I'll skin him and make a specimen of him to take him back to England and exhibit him as a demon. Hang him! I don't know what I won't do!" cried the doctor, stamping with passion. "Here, you two," he cried, "don't stand staring like that, but bring the young lady some coffee."

The two Malay boatmen, who had been terribly puzzled at their master's behaviour with one they took to be an escaped slave, obeyed his orders at once, looking very peculiar the while.

"Don't you see who it is, you scoundrels?" cried the doctor, storming. "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing, master," said the elder boatman, submissively, for what so great a man as the doctor—one who could bring people back to life, as he had the reputation of having done before now—chose to do must be good and right.

"That's better," exclaimed the doctor, energetically. "Now some biscuits. Come, my dear, try and eat and drink. I wish to goodness my little woman were here! Come, eat; it will give you strength."

Helen made a lame effort or two, but the food seemed to choke her.

"And I'd come out to find Solomon's gold," muttered the doctor. "Solomon's Ophir; I seem instead to have found Solomon's wives, or rather one of them. Bless my heart! bless my soul! Well, really I never did!"

He looked at Helen wonderingly, and then ran mentally over the trouble at the station as he longed to question his "new specimen," as he called her, but felt some delicacy in speaking.

"Come, come," he said at last, "you do not eat."

"Oh, no, no, Doctor!" she cried, in hysterical tones. "I cannot eat: what shall I do?"

"One moment," said the doctor; "tell me, do I apprehend rightly, that you have escaped from that scoundrel?"

"Yes," she whispered, hoarsely; and she shuddered as she spoke. "He came yesterday—no, it must have been days ago. I don't know: my head is troubled. He came, and I said I would escape and die in the jungle if I could not get to the station."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, feeling her pulse, for she seemed to grow more composed.

"And I did escape: one of the Rajah's women helped me, and we fled together through the jungle, toiling on amongst thorns and canes, and always ready to drop, till we sank down wearily to sleep."

"Yes, my poor child," said the doctor; "but where is your companion?"

"I—I don't know," said Helen, in a strange, dazed way. "She must be somewhere. I went to sleep, and she was with me, and I awoke and she was gone. But, Doctor, dear Doctor Bolter, I am not what I was. Pray do not let me fall into that wretch's hands again!"

"Never fear," exclaimed the doctor, to give her confidence, and he assumed a matter-of-fact, confident air as he spoke. "Look here, my dear child, eat and drink to gain strength, and I will then take you back in my boat. Don't be alarmed. You will be quite safe."

Helen made an effort to partake of the coffee, and as the doctor drank his own, it suddenly struck him that he used to have a great dislike to Helen Perowne, while now he had been treating her with the most affectionate solicitude.

"And quite right, too," he muttered. "Her position enlists sympathy. Why, I should be a brute if I did not behave kindly and well."

The difficulties of his position became more apparent to him as he thought the matter over.

Murad had carried off Helen no doubt in accordance with a deeply-laid scheme; and knowing what his position would be if the latter were discovered, of course he would spare no pains to recapture his prisoner.

"He knows it's death, and a complete finish of his Rajahship," muttered the doctor; "and sooner than be found out the reptile would shoot me down like a dog—if I don't get the chance to shoot him first; and hang me if I don't feel just now as if I could send a charge of shot through him with the greatest pleasure in life!"

He felt that if the followers of Murad were to find out the direction taken by the fugitive they would soon be on her track, and he would be almost helpless—one against a strongly-manned boat, whose crew would know their lives depended upon the success of their efforts.

Under these circumstances he determined to draw the boat well up among the rocks, and then to lie in concealment until the evening, when they might float down under cover of the darkness.

But no sooner had he determined upon this than the thought of the difficulties of the navigation came uppermost in his mind. It was hard enough to get safely up the little river by daylight. In the darkness he was compelled to own that it would be impossible.

"I must run all risks," he said; "there is nothing else for it. We must get down to the mouth of the river and out into the main stream as soon as possible," and having fully made up his mind what he would do, he turned to Helen Perowne.

"I am going to start at once," he said; "but before we set off—I say this so as to help me, perhaps, in our effort to get away—"

"Effort to get away?" she said, piteously. "No, no; I don't quite mean that," he said; "but before we set off would you not like to make yourself look a little more like an English lady?"

She looked up at him with an imploring look, and the tears began to trickle down her cheeks.

"Only too gladly, doctor; but you do not understand. They managed their cruel task only too well! Do you not see?—this is a stain, and it cannot be removed!"

The doctor frowned as he thought of his store of drugs and chemicals at home in his little palm-thatched cottage, where he wished they were themselves; and then he wondered whether there was anything amongst them that would remove the brown tint from his companion's face.

She rose as he held out his hand, but trembled so much, and seemed so agitated, that when he led her to the boat she would have tottered and fallen had not the doctor caught her in his arms, and lifted her in; while directly after the two stout Malays thrust the boat over the shallow sands and gravel till deeper water was reached, the current helping them in their task, which was a long and arduous one, for there were long stretches of shallow and rapid, over which the bottom of the sampan grated before the paddles could be used.

And all this time the doctor noted that his companion's wild eyes were constantly searching the shore for danger, such as he was fain to confess might be encountered at any moment, and in view of which he carefully charged his revolver, and altered the cartridges in both barrels of his gun.

At last, though, the boatmen were able to give up wading, and seizing their paddles, they leaped into the boat, making it glide down the stream, whose course here was very swift.

The doctor talked to his companion, but she was very silent, and they were soon both of them occupied in watching the shores, the doctor growing more uneasy moment by moment; while Helen, in her ignorance, felt that every paddle-stroke took her farther and farther from pursuit—made her safer from being recaptured by him who caused a shudder—when literally she was now every hour being taken nearer to the house that had been her prison all through those weary days.

As the time wore on the doctor asked her a few questions about her adventures, but he noted that she trembled so, and became so painfully agitated, that from sheer kindness he soon refrained; and leaving her to make what confidences she chose, he sat with his gun across his knee, watching the shore for enemies, and they journeyed on almost in silence.

The Malay boatmen saw that there was danger. They had not recognised Helen at first; but now that they knew her they coupled the meeting in their own minds with the troubles at the station, and from time to time they cast uneasy glances at the doctor's revolver as it lay upon the seat, and from that began watchfully to scan such portions of the shore as might be deemed dangerous from affording opportunities for an ambush from which spears would come whizzing with unerring aim.

In the ardour of his pursuit after the favourite myth of his imagination the doctor had not noticed the distance he had ascended this narrow, winding stream; but now that he was all anxiety to reach the great river, it seemed as if it would never end.

The sun poured down his ardent rays, and but for the awning of boughs that the Malays had cut and spread over her head, the heat to the rescued girl would have been unbearable. Everything, however, that could alleviate her position was done, and more than once she gave the doctor a grateful look, as in a weary, broken-spirited way, she faltered her thanks.

"*Not* much like the Helen Perowne of the past," he muttered, as he resumed his seat, after supplying his patient with water, and once more scanning the sides of the river for danger.

There was nothing to be seen, though, for they had descended now to where rocks had given place to jungle, and the banks were one impenetrable mass of creeper-enlaced trees, the monotony being hardly enlivened now by the sight of a bird.

"Look!—look!" whispered Helen, suddenly. "That is where they took me from the boat!" and she pointed to an opening in the jungle, the doctor recognising the spot which he had noticed as they came up the river, and here was where the prahu had turned.

"There is a house inland from here, then?" said the doctor.

Helen shuddered.

"Yes," she said, faintly; "my prison. I cannot bear to talk about it now."

The doctor nodded: and feeling that this was the critical part of the journey, he bade the Malays eat and drink as they paddled on, so as to gain strength for any energetic push they might have to make. For his own part he was decided enough as to the course he would pursue, meaning to trust to flight if possible, but if pursued he vowed to himself that he would fire upon his pursuers.

"And I am an Englishman!" he said to himself, proudly. "They dare not fire upon me!"

"Double pay if you get us safely back to the station," he said, "and in quicker time."

The boatmen nodded and smiled, toiled harder with their paddles, and they were half-way back to the great river at least, when plainly heard upon the still afternoon air, came the loud beat of the many oars of a great prahu.

Preparing for a Start.

"Now look here, boy," said Chumbley. "I grant the possibility of the Inche Maida having assisted in carrying off Helen, but we do not know that she did. What we do know is—"

"That she confessed—"

"Not to helping, or anything of the kind. She told us that she was another man's wife by now."

"Well, that shows that she was cognisant of the matter; and I say that we ought to make a clean breast of the affair."

"Well, I'm such a pusillanimous coward, that I can't screw myself up to doing anything of the kind. One can't help feeling foolish over the matter. Hang it all, no, keep it quiet! We are in an out-of-the-way place certainly; but this is an awfully small marble of a world, and if we tell our story, it would get into the *Straits Times*, and from that into the Calcutta papers; and once there, the tit-bit of two officers being carried off by a wicked Eastern princess will soon run over to England, and go the round of the press. Why, hang it, man, we had better retire from the service!"

Hilton stood leaning half out of the window of their quarters listening to his friend.

"It would be awkward," he said.

"Awkward's nothing to it, my dear boy. And besides, you know what comes about if we make all known. Harley will consider that he is in duty bound to arrest the Inche Maida, or something of the kind, and then look at the consequences!"

"But the woman ought to be punished."

"Yes, of course; but the punishment is coming. You see by her act she has shut herself out from all connection with the station, and I daresay if the truth is known she has collected her valuables and fled."

"I hope she has," replied Hilton, "for if steps are taken to arrest her, I should be, I confess, sorry for her to be caught."

"Let it slide then," cried Chumbley; "we can't war against a woman. Come, you'll oblige me, old fellow, greatly, by giving way."

"What do you want me to do then?"

"A little ill that good may come: keep to our story of having been seized and not knowing where we were taken."

Hilton nodded and looked thoughtful.

"You give way then?"

"Yes, I give way."

"Hilton, old fellow, I'm much obliged. I know we shall have, perhaps, to do a little bit of invention, but it is invention to save a woman, and there is a lot of truth in it. Then, too, see how it saves us."

"Still, I can't help thinking that, if she had anything to do with carrying off Helen Perowne, she ought to be punished; and mind this, though I care nothing for Helen now, if it proves afterwards that she helped in that cruel affair, I'll have no mercy upon her."

"She had nothing to do with it, take my word," said Chumbley, who had grown so excited that he forgot to drawl. "Here's the case, depend upon it. She got to know that Murad meant to carry off Helen, and she thought that she would do the same by you."

"Wretched creature!"

"Say silly child," said Chumbley. "These people have half of them the cleverness and weak, petty ways of children combined."

"Then you feel certain that Murad alone carried off Helen?"

"I lay a hundred to one he has. Harley's right. When do we start?"

"In an hour's time. The scoundrel has not been seen by any of his people in Sindang, so they say."

"We shall have some warm work up there in the jungle."

"No doubt of it; but we'll rout the serpent out—Oh, here is Harley!"

The Resident was coming up hastily from the landing-stage, followed by a couple of soldiers leading a Malay between them.

"A prisoner, eh?" said Chumbley. "Well, his evidence will have to be taken with a pinch of salt. Now, Harley, what's the news?"

"This fellow has come, saying that he bears an important message. I would not hear him till I had you two present."

They went out into the veranda, took seats, and the man salaamed, and was asked his business.

He said that he had been charged with a message to the Resident by one of the Rajah's women. It was to tell him that the lady Helen had been taken up the river to the Rajah's shooting-house, and was kept there against her will.

"Are you sure of this," said the Resident, hoarsely. "I have said," replied the man, with dignity. "Have you seen her there?"

"Once only, master. She is kept shut closely up."

"And when did you get this message?"

"It is nearly thirty days ago, master."

"Then why did you not bring it sooner?"

"I came down the river by night in my little boat, master, and reached the town here; but found that I could not get near the Resident."

"Why not?" said Mr Harley, sharply. "I am always to be seen."

"You were watched, master; and I was watched."

"Watched! Who watched me?"

"Murad's men. They were everywhere."

"Murad's men? Watching?"

"Yes, master, it is true. They lay about in boats or idled, chewing their betel on the shore and landing-stage. They would seem to you like common people who had nothing to do, but they were all watching carefully the while."

"And would they have stopped you?"

"Yes, master; they did."

"Then you have kept this message all the time in spite of this?"

"Yes, master."

"Without trying to deliver it?"

"No; I tried. I could not get to you or any I could trust unseen; but I know that you Englishmen are all friends, and that if I told one he would tell you, so I thought of the doctor."

"And told him?" said the Resident. "No; I could not approach an Englishman at all. I waited my chance: two days had gone, and then, after much thinking, I made my plan."

"Yes, be quick," said the Resident, impatiently. "I pretended to be hurt."

"Yes; and went to the doctor," said Hilton. "Did you tell him?"

"If my masters will let me tell my story," said the man, with dignity, "it will be best."

Mr Harley made a sign to his companions to be silent, and the man went on:

"I looked about for a house where I fancied I should not be watched, and went to a lady, saying I was badly hurt, and asking that she would fetch the doctor to me."

"Why did you not tell her your message?"

"She talked too much—I was afraid," said the man, quietly. "But she took compassion on me and went to fetch the doctor. 'Now,' I said, 'my task is done.' But my enemies were too watchful, and soon after my messenger to the doctor had gone, six men entered the house; I was seized, gagged, and carried off to a boat, and rowed away. They questioned me, but I was dumb; and then they kept me prisoner till two days back, when I escaped and came down here."

"Then why were you not kept back from approaching me this time?" said the Resident, sternly.

"I know not, master, only that those who watched are gone. The place was full of Murad's men before. Now they are not."

"He is right," said Hilton. "Murad has taken the alarm. He knows by his spies that the game is up."

"Could you take us to this place?" said the Resident.

"I could; but I wish to live," said the Malay. "I have a wife."

"You mean that Murad's people would slay you if you led us there?"

The Malay bowed.

"You may trust to the English power," said the Resident, sternly. "If what you say be correct, Murad's reign is at an end, and you may depend upon us for protection. Will you lead us to the place where this lady is shut up?"

"If the English chief will promise me protection."

"You shall be protected," said the Resident, quietly; "and you shall be well rewarded."

The Malay bowed again.

"What do you think?" said the Resident, turning to Hilton, and speaking in French, to make sure that the Malay did not understand.

"I think the man is right, and I would take him for guide; but all the same, we know what these people are: it may only be a treacherous, misleading plan."

"We must be well on the alert as to that," replied the Resident. "I think the man is honest."

"So do I," said Chumbley, "for there is no temptation for him to have been otherwise."

"Stay with those two men," said the Resident, addressing the Malay; "we are going with an armed expedition directly, and you shall be our guide."

The man was led away, and the Resident watched him intently as he went out.

"Yes, I think the Malay is honest," he said quickly. "Are you fellows ready?"

"Yes; we only wait your orders," replied Hilton. "I am fidgeting to be off."

"There is much to be done first. Let us go now and see Perowne, I promised to communicate with him before we left. You have not seen him yet?"

"No."

They walked down to the landing-place, where the Resident's large boat was being well manned, and ammunition and rations for three or four days were being stored. There a small boat was waiting, and they were paddled across, to walk up to Mr Perowne's, both Hilton and Chumbley starting, as they saluted the merchant, to see what a change his late troubles had wrought upon his personal appearance.

He shook hands with the officers in a quiet, grave way, and then stood looking in a vacant manner out of the window and across the lawn towards the river.

"We must not start without Bolter," said the Resident, sharply, as if the idea had just crossed his mind. "Any news of him?"

"No," said Hilton; "we have heard nothing; but are you sure that he has not returned?"

"He would not have returned without reporting himself," replied the Resident, who, like Mr Perowne, seemed to have grown older and more hollow of cheek.

"I am quite ready to start," said Mr Perowne, in an absent manner. "They tell me, Mr Hilton, you were seized that same night, and carried up the river. Are you sure that my Helen was not taken to the same place?"

"I am certain, Mr Perowne," said Hilton, gravely. "The best answer to that is the presence of Mr Chumbley and myself. We should not have come away and left an English lady in such a situation."

The Resident cast a keen, inquiring look at Hilton, and Mr Perowne went on feebly:

"No, no, of course not; but I thought I'd ask, Mr Hilton. I've had a deal of trouble lately; and my head is very bad."

"Let us go across to the doctor's," said Mr Harley. "There is the chance of his being back. I really feel that, urgent as our necessities are, we must not start without him."

"We ought to have him," replied Hilton. "We are sure to have some wounded."

"And wounds are awful in this climate, if not attended to at once."

"Yes," assented the Resident. "Will you come with us, Perowne?"

"No," said that gentleman, dreamily. "I shall stay until the expedition starts."

Mr Perowne seated himself upon a low stool, and buried his face in his hands, looking so utterly prostrate, that the Resident crossed to his side, bent down over him and whispered:

"For heaven's sake, be hopeful! I am straining every nerve to get the expedition off!"

"But you are so long—so long!" moaned the wretched man.

"Do not you reproach me," said Mr Harley. "Have some pity for my position. I am even now going beyond my tether

in what I am doing; and I hardly dare take a party of men up in this jungle without a doctor with us! Perowne, on my honour, I am burning to go to Helen's help; but I am tied down by red tape at every turn. You don't know what such a position as mine really is!"

"Go and see if Bolter has come back," said Mr Perowne, coldly.

"Yes," said the Resident, to himself, "if not, we must go without him."

The Resident turned away, beckoning Hilton to follow; and leaving Chumbley sitting with the stricken father, they went towards the doctor's cottage.

Volume Three—Chapter Fifteen.

Jeopardy.

Helen caught the sound of the oars at the same moment as the doctor, and he heard her draw a spasmodic breath as she started up in her dread and seized his arm, clinging to it convulsively.

The doctor rose, and shading his eyes, gazed down the stream, but there was no prahu as yet in sight; and he then glanced to left and right for a hiding-place beneath the overhanging trees.

A glance, however, showed him that there was not shelter enough here to cover a boat of half the size; and in despair as to what he should do, he turned to the Malays, who evidently read his perplexity, and shook their heads.

They might have turned the boat and tried to get beyond where they knew the prahu would stop and turn, but that would have taken hours, and they must have been either overtaken or seen long before they had reached the spot.

"Nothing but impudence will do it," thought the doctor, and he turned sharply to Helen. "Lie down in the boat my dear, and trust to me," he whispered.

"Doctor," she moaned passionately, "kill me, but don't let me fall again into that wretch's hands!"

"Is this Helen Perowne?" thought the doctor, as with patient trust she submitted to him as he laid her back in the bottom of the boat, threw the great green branches overboard, and covered her loosely with the waterproof sheet, upon which he tossed his macintosh; and then quickly changing the cartridges once more, he coolly sat up, watched his opportunity, after telling the Malays to paddle smoothly, and brought down a handsome green parrot from a bough overhanging the river.

The beat of the prahu's oars ceased on the instant, and coolly telling the Malays to make for the fallen bird, the doctor retrieved it, and threw it carelessly upon the waterproof sheet, full in view for anyone passing to see.

"Let the boat drift down," he said to the Malays; and then to Helen: "Don't be alarmed: I am shooting birds."

He had hardly reloaded before another opportunity presented itself, and he shot a brilliantly-plumaged trogon, which he was in the act of picking from the water where it had fallen as the stream bore them full in view of the same large prahu that had passed them when making his way up the main river.

The doctor took hardly any notice of the prahu but carefully shook the water from his specimen and smoothed its plumage, giving just a casual glance at the long row-boat, whose swarthy crew were watching his acts; and then, as the stream swept them by, he reloaded, and sat with the butt of his gun upon his knee, apparently looking out for another specimen.

All the same, though, he had an eye for the prahu, whose crew were evidently canvassing his presence there; but he seemed to be so occupied with his old practice of collecting brightly-plumaged birds—a habit for which he was well known—that no one thought of stopping him, and a bend in the river soon separated them from the enemy.

The doctor laid down his gun, and after satisfying himself by a glance that the trees completely shut out all view, he raised the covering from the half-suffocated girl, who lay pale and panting there.

"The danger has passed," he whispered; then, turning to the boatmen: "Now," he cried, "row for your lives!"

They needed no further incentive, but bent to their work, sending the sampan surging through the water; and the stream being rapid here, they made good way, the prahu having, fortunately for them, thoroughly loosened the tangled water-weeds that otherwise would have hindered their flight.

The doctor listened to the beat of the prahu's oars, which seemed to grow more distant. Then the noise stopped, and recommenced in a different way, the beat sounding short and choppy.

"What does that mean?" he muttered, thoughtfully; but he smoothed his brow as he saw that Helen was watching him intently.

Suddenly he started, for he read the meaning of the sounds, which did not grow more distant.

"They are not satisfied," he said to himself, "and are coming after us. The prahu cannot turn; the river is too narrow here, and they are backing water."

He tried to doubt his own words; but as they entered upon a long straight portion of the river, down which they glided

rapidly, he gazed back, and just as they neared the end of the reach he saw the prahu in full pursuit.

"Paddle hard," he cried; "they must not overtake us. Quick! get round out of sight: we shall get on better in the sharp windings, and leave her more behind."

He was not sure of this, but hoped it would be the case; and he was in the act of hoping this when—*bang!*—there was a sharp report from a lelah on board the prahu, and a pound ball came skipping along the surface of the stream, splashed up the water a few yards away, and then crashed in amongst the dense jungle-growth to the left.

"Paddle, my lads, paddle away!" shouted the doctor; and the men toiled on, every muscle seeming to stand out of their bronze arms, and the veins starting in neck and brow as they obeyed his words, till the boat seemed as if it were skimming like a bird over the surface of the stream.

"That's right! Good! good!" he cried, in the Malay tongue. "I never saw boat worked so well before."

His words seemed to give the men fresh strength, and they forced the sampan on with renewed force. The water rattled and surged beneath her bows, and so good was the speed they now made, that in another minute they would have been out of sight, when a second shot from the prahu's gun came skipping along, and this time aimed so well, or so cleverly winged by fate, that it struck the flying boat, cutting a great piece out of her gunwale.

"Pooh! that's nothing. Never mind the shot!" cried the doctor, coolly. "I'll wager a new silk sarong, to be fought for by gamecocks, that they could not do that again. Dip your paddles deep, my lads; paddle away, and we'll soon leave them far enough behind."

The bend of the river that they had turned gave them some slight chance of escape, and the men worked better and with less display of nervous hesitation. Bank and trees shut them now from the sight of the marksmen on board the prahu, and there is less difficulty in toiling at the paddle when you know that no one is taking careful aim at your back.

The moment they were out of sight of the prahu's crew the doctor stood up in the boat, one moment urging on the men, the next searching the shores for some satisfactory hiding-place—some inlet or opening among the trees into which the sampan might be thrust with some little chance of its escaping the keen eyes of their pursuers, who would be pretty well on the alert for such a trick as this. There were trees overhanging the stream in plenty, but as far as he could see the foliage was not sufficiently dense to be trusted at a time like this; and feeling at last that their only chance of safety was by making for and reaching the main river, he kept on encouraging the men, and in the pauses speaking words of comfort to Helen Perowne.

She lay back utterly prostrate, but turned her eyes to the doctor with an imploring gaze that he read easily enough, interpreting it to mean—"Save me from these wretches, or shoot me sooner than I shall fall into their hands!"

"I mean to save you, my dear," he said to himself; but all the same, he examined the cartridges in his gun, and his fingers played with the trigger, as he listened intently to the sounds of pursuit.

"I'd give something for this to be the cutter of a frigate, well manned with jacks and with half a dozen of our red-coats in the stern sheets. I don't think we should be showing them how fast we could run away at a time like this. But one must show them a little strategy sometimes."

He looked back, but they were still well out of sight of the prahu, the heavy beat of whose oars seemed to come from close behind the trees, though it was still some distance away.

He scanned this bank—the other bank—but now the trees seemed thinner, and the chances of hiding successfully to grow less; and for a moment something like despair crept into the doctor's heart.

But he was too well used to emergencies to fail at critical moments; and, bracing himself up, the momentary despairing feeling was gone.

"Is there no end to this wretched river?" he cried, half aloud; and he gave his foot an impatient stamp, which started the men afresh just as they had slackened their efforts, and once more they went on toiling along the narrow, winding stream, the tortuous way seeming to grow more intricate minute by minute, and fortunately for them, as their little boat skimmed round the turns, while the prahu's passage was ponderous and slow.

But every now and then some straight piece of the river would give the enemy his chance, and the rowers forced the prahu along, so that she gained ground.

There was no mistaking it, and the doctor's fingers tightened upon his gun, as he saw how rapidly his pursuers were gaining; while his own men were becoming terribly jaded by their tremendous efforts, and moment by moment their strokes were losing force.

Worse still, as he gazed back, he could see that something was going on in the bows of the prahu, and he needed no telling what it was—they were again loading and training their heavy gun; and "if," the doctor thought, "they wing us now, our chances are gone!"

It was not a pleasant thing to do, to stand there offering himself as it were for a target to the next shot; but this did not occur to the doctor, who kept his ground, and the next moment there was a puff of white smoke from the prahu's side.

Volume Three—Chapter Sixteen.

Blind as a Mole—is said to be.

“Poor Perowne seems nearly heartbroken,” said the Resident, as they went down the path; and then bitterly, the words slipping out, incidental upon one or two remarks of Hilton’s—“He seems to suffer more than you.”

“I feel as much hurt at Miss Perowne’s abduction as does any man at the station,” said Hilton, hotly; “but if you mean, Mr Harley, that I am not grieving like a suitor of this lady should, you are quite right.”

“Quite right?” said the Resident, quickly.

“I said quite right,” replied Hilton, sternly; “every pretension on my part was at an end before the night of that unfortunate party.”

“I beg your pardon, Hilton,” cried the Resident, warmly. “I am not myself. I ought not to have spoken in so contemptibly mean a way. Bear with me; for what with my public duties, and the suspense and agony of this affair, my feelings have at times been maddening.”

“Bear with you, yes!” said Hilton, warmly. “Harley, I sympathise with you. I do indeed, and believe me, I will be your right hand in this matter; but we have had so little chance of talking together. Tell me what has been done.”

“Comparatively nothing,” replied the Resident. “I have been helpless. I have had my suspicions; but, situated as I was, I could not act upon suspicion only; and when, to satisfy myself, I have tried diplomatic—as we call mean, but really underhanded—means by spies to find out if there was anything wrong, every attempt has failed.”

“You have sent out people to search then?”

“Scores!” cried the Resident; “but in the majority of cases I feel certain that I have only been paying Murad’s creatures; and when I have not, but obtained people from down the river, the cunning Malays have blinded them to the facts.”

“I see.”

“Then Murad himself, he has been indefatigable with his help.”

“To throw you off the scent,” said Hilton.

“Exactly. Then there was the finding of the stove-in boat, and portions of the dresses of those who apparently occupied her—everything pointing to some terrible accident. What would the authorities have said had I, on the barest suspicion, seized upon Murad and charged him with this crime? A public official cannot do that which a private individual might attempt.”

Hilton walked on by his side, very moody and thoughtful.

“I have felt suspicious of this cunning villain all along; and I do not feel quite satisfied that the Inche Maida has not been playing into his hands. But what could I do—on suspicion merely! Even now, had he not absented himself from Sindang, we could hardly venture upon this expedition. In spite of what we have heard, he may be innocent.”

“My head upon it he is guilty!” cried Hilton, fiercely: “and if we do bring him to book—”

The Resident looked at his companion curiously, for the young officer ceased speaking, and he saw that there was a fixed, strange look in his eye, and that his lips were drawn slightly from his teeth.

“If we do bring him to book,” said the Resident, quietly, “he shall suffer for it.”

“Suffer!” cried Hilton, excitedly. “Look here, Harley, I vow to you now that if Helen Perowne offered me her hand to-morrow, and asked me to marry her, I should refuse; but all the same, I’d strike down the man who offered her the slightest insult; and as for this Murad, if we run him to earth, and he is guilty, I’ll shoot him like a dog.”

“Leave that revolver alone,” said the Resident, quietly, as unconsciously Hilton took the weapon from its pouch at his belt and began turning the chambers round and round.

The young officer hastily thrust the weapon back and tightened his belt. By that time they had reached the doctor’s house, where, upon entering, they found little Mrs Bolter looking flushed and annoyed, and opposite to her Mrs Barlow, the picture of woe.

“Has he come back?” said the Resident, hastily, after the customary salutations.

“No, he has not come back,” said Mrs Bolter, rather excitedly.

“Alas! no, he has not returned,” said Mrs Barlow, in tragic tones. “I fear we shall never see him more.”

“Are you speaking of Dr Bolter, madam?” said the Resident, wonderingly.

“Of the doctor, sir? No!” cried Mrs Barlow, indignantly, “but of the chaplain.”

“Oh!” said the Resident, and a feeling of compunction entered his breast to think how small a part Mr Rosebury had

seemed to play in this life-drama, and how little he had been missed.

“Captain Hilton,” said little Mrs Bolter, taking the young officer aside to the window, while her visitor was talking to Mr Harley, “it’s a shame to trouble you with my affairs directly you have come out of trouble yourself, and just as you are very busy, but if someone does not take that woman away I shall go mad!”

“Go mad, Mrs Bolter?”

“Yes; go mad—I can’t help it. I’m worried enough about the disappearance of my poor brother Arthur; then I am forsaken in the most cruel way by my husband; and as if that was not enough, and just when I am imagining him to be suffering from fever, or crocodiles, or Malay people, or being drowned, that dreadful woman comes and torments me almost to death.”

“What, Mrs Barlow? Well, but surely, if you give her a hint—”

“Give her a hint, Captain Hilton! I’ve asked her to go over and over again; I’ve ordered her to go—but it’s of no use. She comes back and cries all over me in the most dreadful way.”

“But why?—what about?”

“She has got a preposterous notion in her head that she is in love with my poor brother, and that he was very much attached to her because he called upon her once or twice. It’s really dreadful, for I don’t believe my brother ever gave her a thought.”

“You must reason with her, Mrs Bolter,” said Hilton, who could not help feeling amused.

“It is of no use: I’ve tried, and all I get for my pains is the declaration that she must give me the love that she meant for my brother. She says she shall make her will and leave all to me, for she shall die soon; and the way in which she goes on is horrible.”

“Well, it must be a nuisance where you don’t care for a person,” said Hilton.

“Nuisance: it’s unbearable! And now I’m talking to you about it, and very absurd you must think me; but if I didn’t relieve my mind to somebody I’m sure I should go mad. But won’t you come into the drawing-room?”

“Certainly,” said Hilton.

“I came out here to speak to her,” continued little Mrs Bolter; “because if she gets into my little drawing-room, she takes a seat, and I can never get her out again. Perhaps,” she whispered, “she’ll go as soon as she has said all she wants to Mr Harley.”

Hilton followed the little troubled body into the drawing-room, and then started and turned hot as he saw Grey Stuart rise to her feet, and stand there, looking deadly pale.

“Miss Stuart!” he exclaimed.

She made an effort to control herself, but her strength was not superhuman; and coming forward, she took Hilton’s extended hand, looked at him with her lips quivering, and then burst into a loud fit of sobbing.

“We thought you dead,” she said, in an excited manner. “Pray forgive me. It is so weak. But Helen?”

“We have great hopes of rescuing her,” said Hilton, whose heart was beating fast, as he asked himself what this emotion really meant. Then he cooled down and felt hurt, for he told himself that her last words explained it. Helen Perowne and she had been schoolfellows, and he had disappeared at the same time; now he had returned, but without Helen, and his appearance was a shock to her.

“There, there, there, my dear child,” said Mrs Bolter, who felt scandalised at this weakness on the part of her favourite; “don’t cry—pray don’t cry. You’re very glad to see Captain Hilton back of course, but you must save a few tears for poor Mr Chumbley as well. When is he coming to see us, Captain Hilton?”

“Not on this side of our expedition,” said the young officer, quietly. “We start as soon as possible, and have hopes of bringing back Miss Perowne and your brother.”

“Then you do think he was taken as well, Captain Hilton?” cried Mrs Bolter, eagerly.

“I feel sure he was, now,” replied Hilton. “He was no doubt in attendance upon Miss Perowne, and they were taken together.”

“Then if he was,” said little Mrs Bolter, brightening, “I am very glad, for Helen Perowne’s sake for some things,” she added, giving her head a sharp shake.

This short colloquy gave Grey Stuart an opportunity of recovering herself; and she blessed the brisk, talkative little woman for drawing attention from her, so that when next she spoke, she was able to command herself thoroughly, and continue the conversation in her ordinary calm, self-possessed way.

“I began to despair at one time of getting back to the station,” Hilton said, lightly; “and I was very tired of being a prisoner, I assure you.”

He looked intently at Grey as he spoke, and the pleasant warmth of her manner as she replied touched and pleased

him but he was fain to confess that it was only the lively interest that any girl in her position would take in one who had been lost in the same way as he, and was now found.

"I am very glad to see you back, Mr Hilton," she said. "We were in great trouble about you. But when shall we see Mr Chumbley?"

"Soon, I hope," he replied, quietly, and there was a curious sinking feeling at his heart as she spoke.

"She would have shown just as much emotion at seeing him for the first time," he thought. "What a sweet, innocent, gracious little woman it is, and how much happier I might have been, if I had made her the object of my pursuit."

"Tell me about Mr Chumbley," said Grey, taking up her work; "did he suffer much when you were prisoners?"

"Suffer? No!" said Hilton, smiling. "If he did, he never showed it. He's a splendid fellow, and takes things so coolly."

"Oh, yes, he is, indeed!" cried Grey. "I do like Mr Chumbley."

Hilton's heart sank a little lower, and there was almost a ring of sadness in his voice as he went on:

"He kept my spirits up wonderfully by his *nonchalant*, easy way. He was a capital companion and never once showed that he was low-spirited or suffered in the least."

"He is very strong and brave, is he not?" said Grey.

"Why, the little body loves him," thought Hilton; "and I had hoped—Bah! let me be a man, and not a manger-loving cur. What right have I to think she could have cared for me?"

"Strong and brave!" he said, aloud. "Why, Chumbley professes to be a coward—"

"A coward! Oh, no!" cried Grey, flushing. "I cannot believe—"

"While he is as brave as a lion," said Hilton. "That he is, I am sure," cried Grey, warmly; and her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled as she spoke.

"Chum, old fellow," said Hilton, sadly to himself; "I used to laugh at you because you were bested by me, as I thought, but now I envy you your luck. Well, never mind, I can bear it, I daresay, and you deserve it all. I think I shall go back and marry the Inche Maida after all."

"Why, how serious you have turned, Captain Hilton," said Mrs Bolter.

"Captain Hilton is going away directly on what may prove a dangerous expedition."

"Of course; I had forgotten," said Mrs Bolter. "Dear me, that woman is there still, talking to Mr Harley. Will she never go?"

"She will give Chumbley a warmer welcome than she gave me," said Hilton to himself, and he looked reproachfully at the fair, sweet face before him.

"You will be glad to see Chumbley, will you not?" he said aloud.

"Oh, yes, very glad!" she exclaimed, warmly; and then, as she met his eyes fixed inquiringly, she blushed vividly.

"She colours when his name is mentioned," said Hilton to himself. "I wonder whether he cares as much for her. He must—he couldn't help it. There, Heaven bless her! Other people are more fortunate than I."

"That dreadful woman seems as if she would not go," whispered Mrs Bolter. "Pray forgive me for leaving you, Captain Hilton, but I must not let her tease Mr Harley to death as she teases me."

As she spoke little Mrs Bolter left the room, the strident sound of Mrs Barlow's voice coming loudly as the door was opened, while when it was closed all was perfectly silent.

Grey Stuart's hand involuntarily went out as if to stay Mrs Bolter; then it fell to her side, and she sat there painfully conscious and suffering acute mental pain.

"Poor little maiden!" thought Hilton, as he saw her trouble. "She is afraid of me;" and he let his eyes rest upon the open window before he spoke. The intense heat seemed to float into the room, bearing with it the scent of the creepers outside, and of a tall tropic tree covered with white blossoms, whose spreading branches sheltered the doctor's cottage from the blazing sun.

From that hour the warm air, scented with the rich perfume of flowers and those white blossoms clustering without, seemed somehow to be associated in Hilton's mind with Grey Stuart, who sat back there pale now as her white dress, wanting to speak, to break the painful silence, but not daring for some few minutes, lest he should detect the tremble in her voice.

"You start very soon, do you not, Captain Hilton?" she said.

"Yes; I hoped to have been on the river ere this," he said, with a bitter intonation that he could not check.

"And you will discover poor Helen, and bring her back?" she said, forcing herself to speak of a subject that she felt

would be welcome to him.

"If men can do it, we will succeed!" he replied, earnestly.

"Poor Helen!" sighed Grey. "Tell her, Mr Hilton—from me—"

"Yes," he said, eagerly, for she hesitated and stopped.

"That her old schoolfellow's arms long to embrace her once again, and that the hours have seemed very bitter since she has been gone."

"Yes," he said. "I will tell her, Miss Stuart. Poor girl! she will need all the consolation that can be given her, and it will be welcome news to her that she is sure of yours."

"Sure of mine, Captain Hilton? Oh, yes. For many years past I have felt like the sister of Helen Perowne."

"Who is happy in possessing so dear a friend," he said, gravely. "May she ever retain your friendship—nay, I should call it sisterly love."

"She shall," said Grey, in a voice that sounded hard and firm. "I am not one to change lightly in my friendships."

"No," he said, quietly; "you cannot be."

"How quiet and unimpulsive he is," thought Grey. "How wanting in eagerness to go to Helen's help. Surely now that she needs all his sympathy and love—now that she must be in a terrible state of suffering—he could not be so base as to forsake her! He could not, he would not do that! I should hate him if he did."

There was a pause then, and they both seemed to be listening to the hum of voices in the next room; and then Grey Stuart said to herself, softly:

"Should I hate him if he did?"

The answer came directly.

"Yes, for the man I could love must be too chivalrous to wrong a woman by neglect in her time of trial."

"Yes," said Hilton, rousing himself from a state of abstraction, "we must soon be upon the river; I expected that we should have been there before now."

"I pray Heaven for your safety and success, Captain Hilton," said Grey Stuart, gravely.

"And for Chumbley's too?" he said.

"And for Lieutenant Chumbley's and Mr Harley's too," she said, in a low voice.

As she spoke the door opened, and Mrs Bolter entered, followed by the Resident; and as soon as the former was seated, Grey rose, crossed the room, and went and stood with her hands resting upon her chair, the act seeming to give her strength to bear what was becoming painful.

Volume Three—Chapter Seventeen.

A Question of Escape.

Bang! *Crash!*

The report of the brass lelah and the stroke of the iron ball as it shivered the branches of the trees or buried itself in the trunk of some palm-tree growing near the bank, but without injuring the occupants of the sampan in the slightest degree.

The faces of Ismael and his companion were now of a curious muddy hue, and they shivered with dread, but they held the doctor even more in awe, and obeyed his orders to keep on paddling with such strength as was in them left, and seemed ready enough to persevere as long as the boat would float beneath them, hopeless as the case might be.

As the doctor very well knew, it was only a question of time, and had he been alone he would not have hesitated about surrendering; but with Helen in his charge, there was too much at stake. So he determined, with all the stubbornness of an Englishman, to hold out to the very last extremity.

"I'm a man of peace," he muttered, "but I've had to fight in my time, and if I am driven to it, they shall buy Helen Perowne at the cost of three or four lives at least; and if I can manage it, the chiefs shall be one."

He glanced at Helen, who lay back with her eyes closed, and her swarthy face seemed to rouse a bitter feeling of anger in the doctor's breast.

"The blackguards!" he growled. "To serve an English lady like that. I'll make some of them pay for it, and dearly too."

"I say, Bolter," he muttered, "I'd no idea that you were such a brave fellow. I don't feel half so nervous as I expected I

should, and hang me if I'll give up till I have fairly fought it out. I wonder whether I could hit master Rajah Murad at this distance? Well, let him put his head over the side of the boat, and I'll try—What, my dear," he cried, as Helen spoke feebly.

"Is our position hopeless, Doctor?" she said.

"Hopeless? Not a bit of it, my dear. I'm going to exhibit another medicine directly. You lie quite still and don't raise your head. Trust to your medical man, my dear. Always have confidence in your medical man."

For answer she turned her great dark eyes upon him with a look of such hopeless misery that the doctor set his teeth hard.

"By Jove!" he cried, starting in spite of himself, as there was a sharp report and a bullet whistled close by him. "Hi! you scoundrels! How dare you fire upon a boat containing a Queen's officer."

He let the butt of his gun rest in the bottom of the vessel, and turned and shook his fist threateningly at the advancing prahu; but the only answer elicited was another shot, not by any means so well aimed as the last, the sound of which seemed to ring in his ear as it whizzed by.

"The scoundrels shall smart for this!" he cried, furiously. "They've fired—bear witness of this, Ismael—they've fired upon a boat containing a British officer and an English lady, and—hang 'em! there they go again!"

And this shot and another came whizzing by, but the rapid motion of the sampan, the want of practice on the part of the Malays, and their bad management of their clumsy gun, kept them from doing any mischief to the fugitives.

"At last!" cried the doctor, as the dense mass of vegetation that screened the mouth of the little river came in sight. "Now then, my lads, keep up. You shall be rewarded handsomely for this. Make a good dash for it, and we shall soon be clear."

Doctor Bolter's words were big, and his face was cheerful, but his hopes were small, and his heart felt very sad, for he knew well enough that unless as soon as they cleared the canes and bushes before them, and got out into the open river, they found help or concealment, which was extremely doubtful, they would be at a terrible disadvantage. For out in the wide river the prahu would have plenty of room to manoeuvre; it could be driven at full speed, turned easily, and would either run them down or come alongside and grapple them without the slightest difficulty.

"But I'll fight for it to the last," muttered the doctor, as he caught a fresh glance from Helen's sorrowful eyes. "Poor little woman! what a fidget she would be in if she only knew! Never mind, she would pat me on the back for what I am doing; and whatever she might say against it on my account, she'd want me to fight."

He looked back at the prahu, which was still advancing, and raised his gun to fire, but only lowered it again.

"No," he muttered; "a waste of shot. I couldn't hit the steersman."

He stood thinking for a moment, and then, laying down his gun, he took up a spare paddle and began working with all his might, striving to urge the boat forward.

The help came when it was most needed, for the floating reeds and bushes were no light obstacles to so small a boat, and they began to lose ground now as they struggled through. But after a fierce interval of effort, and just as the doctor was growing giddy with excitement, and half blind with exertion, the last mass of bushes was passed, and they floated clear into the swift stream of the main river.

"Now for it, my lads!" cried the doctor, manfully, the perspiration streaming down his red-brown face, as he made the water flash from his paddle; "we shall do it now."

But before they had gone fifty yards down the stream, at a far higher rate than before, they heard the rustle and crashing of the big prahu forcing its way through the bushes, and in another minute it, too, would have been clear.

Fortune does, however, sometimes favour the brave; for just then there was a sharp crack, and one of the prahu's sweeps broke short off, the man who pulled it fell back heavily against his neighbour, who in turn was thrown out, and like skittles, half a dozen of the rowers were in confusion.

This happened at a critical moment, just as the men were rowing their hardest, and the result of the check on one side was that the head of the prahu was pulled sharply round, and the stem crashed in amongst the bushes to the left of the steersman, ran right into the soft, muddy bank, and the vessel lay across the stream.

Doctor Bolter could not tell what was wrong; but he could hear the noise of shouting and the confusion that followed, enough to explain to him that there was something very much amiss, and in the satisfaction that it gave him he mentally exclaimed:

"I don't wish harm to any man upon the face of this little earth, but if that prahu and all on board are going to the bottom, it will be a blessing indeed."

This respite gave the Malay boatmen heart, and bending once more to their task, they strove hard to send the sampan onward so as to get round a curve of the stream where the trees of the jungle grew high upon the bank and spread far out over the river. This bend once passed, they would be out of sight when the prahu cleared the bushes.

It was a long way ahead, and the shouting and confusion seemed so terribly close at hand that the doctor fully expected another shot; but he paddled bravely on, and at last this part of their task was achieved, giving them a

fresh sensation of relief as they saw the wide, open stretch of river before them, with its verdant, tree-shaded banks.

But they looked in vain for help: the stream was clear of boats, and the doctor knew that concealment was now their only chance. The Malay—Ismael—knew it too, for, raising his paddle from the water, he pointed to a dense spot that seemed admirably adapted for a hiding-place; the doctor nodded assent, and with a sweep of the paddle the course of the boat was altered, her head being set across the stream. Then, as the doctor looked back to see that they were not followed, a warning cry from the boatmen made him lower his head, just as the sampan glided in beneath the overhanging boughs, and they floated on in a pleasant arcade of leafy boughs, the grateful shadows shutting them entirely from the sight of passers-by upon the river, whose glittering surface they surveyed through a thick screen of leaves.

Volume Three—Chapter Eighteen.

“I Wish you Success.”

“Gone at last, my dear!” exclaimed Mrs Bolter. “I’m sure that woman will drive me mad.” Then, turning to the Resident—“I feel now, Mr Harley, as if I ought to have opposed it much more strenuously. I don’t like his running up and down the country like this, and I’m very much troubled about it. Of course I don’t put any faith in what such a woman as that Mrs Barlow would say, but she would keep hinting that there is more in these journeys than we know of. I feel, of course, that I ought not to stoop to notice such remarks, but when one is left like this they will make an impression. I don’t think the doctor ought to have gone away and left me alone.”

“I sincerely wish that he had not gone,” said the Resident; “but Doctor Bolter’s ardent love of natural history and his belief in discovery must be his excuses for a great deal.”

“Yes, yes, I know!” cried the little woman excitedly; and a severe mental struggle was evidently going on to keep back something upon her mind. But it was all in vain. The passionate feeling of jealousy that had been lit by the foolish tongue of the woman who had been constantly coming in and harping upon the theme, now began to glow, and in spite of her efforts the anger fanned the flame, till, in a gust of passion that made her cheeks burn with shame for her question, she turned suddenly upon the Resident.

“I know it is a shame and a sin to say such a thing, but I can’t help it now. I think it’s your hot climate here has changed me, and made me what I am—but you are going up the river on this expedition Mr Harley?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Will you wait for him?”

“For the doctor? I’m afraid we must not wait much longer.”

“Then will you go to that woman’s as you pass up the river, and make a thorough search? I’m ashamed to say it, but I feel perfectly sure that Doctor Bolter is there.”

“Where? At the Inche Maida’s?” said the Resident, wonderingly.

“Yes. I am sure he is there.”

“And I am certain that he is not!” cried Hilton, so warmly that the Resident glanced at him.

“But I—I’m greatly afraid he is,” panted Mrs Bolter. “Mrs Barlow said that she felt sure it must be so, and I’ve made a very, very great mistake in leaving my quiet little home in England, and letting my brother accept this chaplaincy.”

“Dear Mrs Bolter—pray hush!” whispered Grey, as her cheeks burned with shame. “It cannot be as you say.”

“My dear Mrs Bolter!” cried the Resident.

“He would not of course of his own ideas,” sobbed Mrs Bolter, who was now thoroughly unhinged; “but he must have called there when looking for gold, or insects, or birds, and been deluded into staying at that dreadful woman’s house.”

“I’ll swear it is not so,” said Hilton, warmly. “There, there, my dear Mrs Bolter, you may make yourself easy on that score! I’ll answer for our old friend the doctor.”

“Bless you, Mr Hilton!” sobbed the little woman, catching at his hands; “it is very, very good of you to say this. I never liked you one-half so well before.”

“You are upset,” said Hilton, warmly, “and no wonder. Your anxiety must be terrible, and I can understand that you feel ready to snatch at any explanation of his long absence; but my dear Mrs Bolter, give us men the credit of being a little too strong to be so easily led away.”

He spoke in so frank and manly a tone, as he stood holding Mrs Bolter’s hands, that Grey’s eyes lit up, and she darted a look at him full of pride and thanks. But it was not seen, for Hilton was looking down at poor, troubled little Mrs Bolter, whose secret, one of which she felt bitterly ashamed, was now out.

She was burning with jealousy, for she idolised her husband; and the love that had so long lain latent seemed to be all the stronger for its long quiescence. She disowned the idea of being jealous to herself, and was about to burst into

a furious speech; but her effort to govern herself succeeded.

Shame and vexation covered her as with a garment; and hiding her face in her hands, she sank back in her chair, sobbing as if her heart would break!

Grey knelt down at her side as Hilton drew back, wrinkling his brow, half with vexation, half with contempt, as he looked now at the Resident.

Mr Harley returned the glance, and they both stood looking on, wanting to leave but hardly liking to stir, as poor little Mrs Bolter sobbed forth her trouble, with her head buried now in Grey Stuart's breast.

"We cannot wait longer," said the Resident at last; "we must go and risk it. If we have any casualties, we must trust to our own surgical knowledge, and do the best we can."

"Yes," said Hilton; "every minute is precious; but I am afraid that we are going to a war of words, and not to a war of weapons. Let us go. Perhaps Mrs Bolter will beg of the doctor to come after us in one of the small boats if we miss him on our way up."

"Stop a minute," said Mrs Bolter, recovering herself by an effort, and standing up, red of eye and cheek. "He will not come back here while you are gone, and I will hesitate no longer. I shall go with you!"

"Go with us?" cried the Resident and Hilton in a breath.

"Yes," said the little woman, decidedly. "I shall go!"

"But it is impossible!" cried the Resident. "There may be fighting!"

"Then you would want help. I do know a little surgery, and more nursing; so I could be of great service."

"But, my dear Mrs Bolter!" cried Hilton.

"Now, it is of no use for you to talk!" cried the little lady. "I feel it is a duty that I am called upon to fulfil. There is my brother somewhere up in those dreadful jungles, as thoughtless and as helpless as a child. He is all strength in goodness and spiritual matters; but as to taking care of himself, he is like a baby. I know he is lost!"

"It is very good of you," said the Resident, warmly; "but, my dear Mrs Bolter, pray trust to us to find all our missing people. You know what Doctor Bolter is."

"Yes—no—yes—no!" she cried, passionately. "I don't quite know him yet; but I know my duty as his—his—wife. I shall go: for if he has, through his weakness, been led into any entanglement with that wretched, wicked black creature, I know and I feel, that at any suffering to myself, I ought to go and fetch him back—and I will!"

As she said this in a fierce determined way, the two officers gazed again in each other's faces, amused, vexed, troubled, puzzled; for what, they silently asked each other, were they to do?

"Mrs Bolter—dear Mrs Bolter!" said Grey Stuart, solving the problem for them, as, in a tender, womanly way, she passed her arm round the determined little lady, and drew her to her breast, "you are angry and upset by your trouble; but you will—no—you cannot do this thing! You love dear Doctor Bolter too well to misjudge him. Pray, pray think of the pain it would give him, did he know that you had thought and spoken like this!"

"And—and as I never did before—before—he came and—and disturbed my quiet life at home!" cried the little woman. "You—you are right, my darling! I—I couldn't do such a thing; and I wouldn't have said it only—only—I am half mad! Don't—don't recollect all this, Harley—Captain Hilton! It is of course impossible! Go at once—and—bring him back to me, for this suspense is more than I can bear!"

"We'll do our best," said the Resident. "There, cheer up. We'll forget all this, and so will you when our dear old friend is back. Tell him we wanted his help and counsel badly, but we could not wait. Tell him, too, that I share his suspicions."

"Suspicious?" cried little Mrs Bolter, firing up once more.

"Yes, on the subject we discussed," said the Resident, gravely, as he shook hands. "There, good-bye. Wish us success."

"Yes, wish us success," said Hilton, taking her hand. "I pledge you my word that you are right in what you now think about the doctor, who is as true a little gentleman as ever breathed!"

Poor little Mrs Bolter uttered a sob, and raised Hilton's hand to her lips and kissed it for the words he had uttered, for she dared not trust herself to speak!

"Good-bye," said the Resident again. "All this is as good as dead, and quite forgotten!"

"Yes, yes," said little Mrs Bolter. "You will keep a sharp look-out for dear Arthur. I feel sure he is wandering about somewhere, half-starved, but loaded with specimens that he has found."

"Good-bye, Miss Stuart," said Hilton, in a low, grave voice, for he felt deeply moved, and his heart had seemed to swell within his breast as he looked on while she had seemed to lead and control her excited, passion-swayed friend. "Wish me success, for I shall try, while I have life, to restore to you your unfortunate friend."

"Yes," she said, softly; and the sad tears stood in her eyes. "I wish you success."

"Helen Perowne will need all your love and sympathy when we bring her back."

"As I pray Heaven you will," she said, quietly. "You will have our constant prayers for your safety. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Their hands touched for a moment, and a thrill of misery flew to each heart.

"How he must love her!" thought Grey. "Oh! Helen, how can you trifle with him as you do?"

"I remember," thought Hilton, as he turned away, feeling as wretched as he had ever felt in his life, "that I used to read a little fable, when I was a child, about a dog and his shadow. I've been running after the shadow all this time, and I have lost the substance. Unlucky dog!"

"What are you thinking about, Hilton?" said the Resident, as they stepped out of the cool, shady veranda into the blazing sunshine, and began walking towards the landing-place to embark for the Residency island.

"Thinking?" said Hilton. "Oh! I don't know; only that it would not be of much consequence if a fellow got a Malay spear through his lungs."

Volume Three—Chapter Nineteen.

Labour in Vain.

The fugitives had not been lying in their shady place of concealment many minutes before the loud buzz of voices and shouting ceased. Then came the whishing and brushing noise of twigs and bushes, and in the midst of the silence that followed they made out the beating of oars once more, and soon after the prahu came into sight, gliding swiftly down the stream.

As it came nearer, those in the sampan hardly dared to breathe, but crouched there, waiting patiently till the great vessel had passed.

So plainly could everything be seen in the broad sunlight that, as the crew were evidently keeping a sharp look-out on both sides, it seemed impossible, in spite of the hanging boughs, for the fugitives to remain unseen.

Nearer came the prahu, the steersman sending it well in towards them; a dozen eyes were fixed upon the leafy screen, and feeling that the time for desperate action had come, the doctor took up his gun and held it ready for use, if, after a parley, the occupants of the prahu sought to rob him of what he reasonably called his prize.

They were anxious moments, and more than once, when the prahu was close abreast, the doctor made sure, from the expression of the men's faces, that they could see through the screen.

But no; the water was ablaze, in its ripple, as it were, with silver fire; the leaves glistened in the sun's rays, and beyond them all seemed to be in impenetrable darkness, the result being that the prahu passed on its way, going faster and faster, till, as the doctor parted the leaves to gaze out, the stern of the long row-boat disappeared round a bend some five hundred yards away, and the question now was, what was the best thing to do?

Helen was nearly fainting with heat and excitement; and gently lifting her, so that her head was by the side, the doctor spent the next few minutes in bathing her face with the clear cold water that glided swiftly in amongst the overhanging boughs.

"Well, Ismael, what next?" said the doctor. "Do you think we might venture to follow them slowly down?"

"No, master!" was the emphatic reply. "The prahu will not go far without finding that we are not in front; then she will leave a small boat with men to see that we do not pass, while the prahu comes back to search the river sides. Sampans and small prahus always hide under the branches like this."

"Then why propose such a blind trick?" cried the doctor.

"If the master could have shown a better way his servants would have been content," said the Malay, humbly.

"But I could not propose a better way!" cried the doctor, angrily. "We could not escape from a swift boat like that. Well, what shall we do?"

"I should land, master, and try to escape through the jungle."

"Impossible!" cried the doctor, glancing at Helen's swollen feet. "She could not walk a mile, and we could not carry her."

"It would not be wise to try and go up-stream, master," said the Malay.

"I don't know that," replied the doctor. "We must get away somewhere. To stay here is to be hunted out and taken."

He paused to listen, and as he did so the beat of the great oars came loudly; and directly after he sank back in the boat with a look of misery upon his face, for the prahu could be seen once more returning up-stream, and to have

attempted to leave their concealment now meant certain capture.

It soon became very evident that the officer in command of the prahu felt sure that they were in hiding somewhere close at hand, for he had his boat steered close in to the opposite shore; and as they glided slowly by, men with poles thrust aside the branches, and keen eyes were evidently peering scrutinisingly amongst the leaves.

The doctor turned angrily in his place, thinking of what he should do; but all thought seemed in vain, and the conclusion was forced upon him that their only chance was to lie quiet and trust to their not being seen.

He was a man, however, of no little activity of mind; and as soon as this was forced upon him he immediately set to work to try and improve their position.

Giving his instructions, then, in a whisper, the sampan was dragged in closer to the shore, and leaves and boughs being reached were dragged over them, the doctor cutting several branches to lay over the boat where it was fixed in its place; and this being done, he made the Malays lie down, he remaining in a kneeling position as he enlaced the boughs above his head till all was to his satisfaction, after which he crouched down and waited.

Poor Doctor Bolter had worked at his task till the perspiration streamed from his face, little thinking that he had closed up every aperture through which danger might enter but one, and that one was plain to anyone in search of the fugitives.

It was very unfortunate, but it never occurred to him. He had broken the branches with the greatest care, turning huge leaves over the broken ends to keep them from looking strange, and he had carefully picked up and laid in the boat every leaf that had been broken off, but still there was a sign visible by which the searchers might detect the hidden party should they use any diligence as they came that way.

The fugitives were not long kept in suspense, for very soon the splash of the prahu's oars was heard, and then the shadow of the great boat shut out some of the light as she brushed against the branches. Oars and poles beat aside the boughs, and the excitement grew intense as the searchers came nearer and nearer. The two boatmen laid their heads upon their knees, and Dr Bolter placed the gun in the bottom of the boat, gave Helen's hand a reassuring pressure, and then took up his revolver as being a better weapon for such close quarters.

"They're in here somewhere," cried a voice in Malayan; "beat the branches aside; they must be found."

The crew of the prahu encouraged each other with shouts as they bent aside the boughs; and the boat, after being rowed some little distance past them, was allowed to drift slowly down, some of the men holding on by the branches to keep her from going down-stream too fast.

The fugitives lay quite still, hardly daring to breathe as this went on, the search at one time being so near that they felt that they must be seen. But in spite of the keen searchings of a score or so of piercing eyes, the prahu slowly passed them lower and lower down the stream, till the voices began to grow faint.

"Saved, my dear," said the doctor, in a whisper. "They will not come back now. Hold up a bit longer, and I will see you safe in your father's arms."

In spite of her efforts, Helen could not keep back a passionate burst of tears, her sobs, stifled though they were, becoming so hysterical that the doctor grew alarmed, and tried hard to comfort her.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered at last, as she calmed down; and he was in the act of raising his handkerchief to wipe his streaming face, when he turned cold, for the prahu was being rowed up-stream once more.

There was nothing for it but to lie still and wait, for there was a possibility of the search being ended; but to their agony and despair, the vessel was allowed to come slowly floating back, the search being continued till, as they came nearly opposite, one of the crew uttered a loud shout, and pointed to where, like a silvery patch in the darkness, the sun was shining in upon the doctor's glistening bald head.

The next minute the prahu's stem was forced in amongst the bushes and overhanging boughs, and half a dozen Malays dropped from her side right into the boat.

Doctor Bolter made a desperate attempt at defending his charge, but one of the prahu's crew leaped right down upon his back, jerking his arm so that the first shot from his revolver went into the jungle, the second through the bottom of the sampan, and the third remained in the pistol-chamber, for the trigger was not drawn, the pistol being wrenched from his hand.

The next few minutes were occupied in binding roughly him and his men, and then, in spite of his angry denunciations and threats of the British vengeance, they were hauled into the prahu. Helen was slung up—she being quite prostrate now—and amidst the laughter and chattering of the swarthy Malays, the prahu's head was turned towards the little river, with the sampan towing behind, and the boats soon after went rushing through the water on their upward way.

"Horrible!" muttered the doctor, as he realised his position. "They will take us up the little river to that scoundrel's place in the jungle, and I never told a soul where we were going. Was ever anything so unlucky? As for that Murad, once let me get the opportunity, and he shall smart for this—a vile, treacherous scoundrel! Poor Helen, what can I do!"

He drew his breath painfully through his teeth as he uttered these words, for just then a showily-dressed Malay went to where Helen was seated, and going down upon one knee, he raised her head.

"Poor girl, she is fainting!" muttered the doctor. Then his heart seemed to stand still, for Helen uttered a piteous cry for help, and for the first time the doctor saw that the showily-dressed Malay supporting Helen's head was the Rajah himself!

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty.

Riches Take to Themselves Wings.

"Ah, Grey, my child," said little Mrs Bolter, with a loud burst of sobbing, as soon as they were alone, "if ever you marry, don't marry a medical man! I try so hard—Heaven knows how hard—not to let such thoughts come into my mind; but I've altered terribly, my dear, since I was married. The doctor has made me love him very much; and it's being so fond of him that has caused this dreadful jealous feeling to spring up; and it finds vent in my being snappish to him, and complaining about all sorts of trifles that are of no consequence at all!"

"But you ought not to let such thoughts come into your mind," said Grey, reproachfully.

"I know I ought not, my dear," said the unhappy little body, clinging to her young friend's hand; "but they will come. It's just as if I were being tempted by mocking spirits, which keep on pretending to open my eyes when the doctor is out."

"Open your eyes, dear Mrs Bolter?" said Grey, who found relief for her own sore heart in trying to soothe another's.

"Yes, my dear. I'm confessing quite openly to you now, my dear; but I know that you will never betray me. They seem to open my eyes to all sorts of things, and make me see the doctor, when he is called in to ladies, taking their bands and feeling their pulses; and oh, my dear, it is very dreadful to sit at home and think that your husband is holding some handsome woman's hand and wrist, and feeling the beatings of her pulses, and perhaps all the time forgetting that he has a poor, anxious little wife at home thinking he is so long away!"

"When that same husband loves you very dearly, and is most likely longing to be back by your side," said Grey, reproachfully.

"If one could only feel that," said Mrs Bolter, "instead of being in such torture and misery, and wishing a hundred times a day that I had never listened to the doctor, and given up our quiet little home!"

"When you have come out to make his life so happy?" said Grey, smiling.

"I try to, my dear; but I can't help thinking sometimes," said the poor little woman, pathetically, "that his heart is more devoted to Solomon's gold—"

"Oh, Mrs Bolter!"

"And apes."

"My dear Mrs Bolter!"

"And peacocks," sobbed the little woman, "than it is to me. Ah, my dear, when you marry—"

"I shall never marry, Mrs Bolter," said Grey, with a sad ring in her voice.

"Oh, you don't know, my child. I used to say so, and think that I was as firm as a rock, and as hard as iron; but, oh, these men—these men—when once you listen to their dreadful, insinuating talk, they seem to get the better of your proper judgment, and end by completely turning you round their finger."

Grey smiled in her face and kissed her.

"There, there!" cried Mrs Bolter, changing her tone, "I am afraid I have lowered myself terribly in your eyes this morning, my dear. I'm growing into a very, very strange creature, and dreadfully weak! Those torturing thoughts keep suggesting to my foolish heart that the doctor has gone up the river on purpose to see the Inche Maida!"

"Oh, no; he cannot!" said Grey, smiling.

"Well, perhaps not, my dear; but whether or no, if he was to come back now, and confess that he had done so, I feel perfectly certain that, after scolding him well, I should forgive him. I've grown to be a very different body to the one you knew when you used to come to us from the Miss Twettenhams'."

"Now, look here, dear Mrs Bolter," said Grey, who, in her friend's trouble, seemed to have changed places with her, and become the elder of the two, "I believe Dr Bolter to be a really good, true man, to whom I should go in trouble and speak to as if he were my father, sure that he would be kind and wise, and help and protect me, whether my trouble were mental or bodily."

"My dear," cried Mrs Bolter, gazing at her with admiration, "you talk like a little Solomon! Ah!" she cried impatiently, "I wish there had never been a Solomon at all!"

"Why?" said Grey, wonderingly.

"Because then Harry would never have been always dreaming about gold, and Tarshish and Ophir, and all that stuff!"

"My dear Mrs Bolter," continued Grey, affectionately, "I feel that I am perfectly right about Doctor Bolter, and I hope you will not be hurt when I tell you that I think you are very hard and unjust to him!"

"Hurt, my darling!" sobbed the little woman, "no, indeed I am very grateful, my dear, and I wish you would scold me well. It would do me good!"

"I am sure, then, without scolding you," said Grey, smiling, "that the doctor is one of the best of men!"

"He is—he is, indeed, my dear!" cried Mrs Bolter; "and I'm sure I'd forgive him anything!"

"And you have nothing to forgive," said Grey. "I am sure of it; and I hope and pray that you will not be so unjust!"

"Do you think I am unjust, my dear?" said the little lady.

"Unintentionally, yes," replied Grey; "and it is such, a pity that there should be clouds in such a happy home!"

"You—you are—a dear little angel of goodness, Grey!" sobbed Mrs Bolter; "and you seem to come like sunshine into my poor, weak, foolish heart; and I'll never be suspicious or unkind to him again! He's only studying a little up the river of course; and I'm—as you've shown me—a weak, foolish, cruel—"

"Affectionate, loving wife," interrupted Grey, who felt herself crushed the next moment in little Mrs Bolter's arms.

"Bless you, my dear!" she cried. "I'll—"

"Hush!" whispered Grey. "Here is my father!" The little lady hastily wiped her eyes as she glanced through the veranda, and saw the bent, thin, dried-up figure of the old merchant coming through the burning sunshine past the window, and then he stopped and tapped at the door.

"May I come in?" he said. "I'm not a patient."

"Yes, yes, come in!" cried Mrs Bolter, cheerfully.

"How do—how do?" he cried, on entering. "Weel, Grey bairnie, how is it with ye?"

He kissed her in his dry fashion, smiling slightly as he smoothed his child's fair hair, and bending down to kiss her.

"I'm verra hot, and verra dry and parched up like, so I thought I'd joost step in and ask for a glass of watter, and joost a soospeeshun of the doctor's bad whuskee to kill the insects."

"Which I'm sure you shall have, Mr Stuart," cried little Mrs Bolter, eagerly.

"Weel, Grey, my bairnie, ye look red in your een and pale, when you ought to be verra happy to think things are all so pleasant and smooth for you."

"Indeed, I try to be very happy and contented, father," she said, with a slight catching of the breath.

"Try," he cried, "try? Why, it ought to want no trying; you ought to be as happy as the day is long."

"For shame, Mr Stuart," cried Mrs Bolter, handing him the large cool tumbler of water with the whiskey already in. "Would you have her show no sympathy for people who are all in trouble? It's a weary, miserable world, and I wonder you can look as happy as you do."

"Hoot—toot, Madam! weary miserable world! Here are you with the best of husbands. You ought to be ready to jump for joy."

"But I'm not," said the little woman, passionately. "But I'm not so miserable as I was."

"That's a comfort," said the little merchant, drily; and he took a sip from his tumbler—a goodly sip—as if he intended to finish all that was there. "Hech! madam, ye didna forget the whuskee."

"Is it too strong, Mr Stuart? Let me put in a little more water."

"Mair watter! nay; ye'd spoil a verra decent drink for a hot day."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Hah! ye ought to be verra happy indeed, wumman, for the doctor's a good man, and a trusty fren'. Hah! that's good whuskee," he added, with a sigh of satisfaction after a deep draught. "Life would be but a sore lookout in these parts wi'-out joost a soop o' whuskee to take the taste o' the crocodiles out o' the watter."

"It is very hot out of doors, is it not, father?" said Grey, who was wondering what he meant to say.

"Ay, it's hot enough," he replied. "An' so ye're not verra happy, Mrs Bolter? Ay, but ye ought to be, and so ought my child Grey here, wi' every comfort in life except extravagances, which I don't hold with at all. She lives well, and dresses quietly, as a young lady should, and her father has not set up a grand house to flash and show in, and then have to give it up, and go and live in one that's wee."

"I don't quite understand you," said Mrs Bolter, colouring slightly, and looking indignant. "But if you are hinting at the doctor being extravagant, I cannot sit here without resenting it, for a more careful man never lived."

"Ay, but he is a sad dog, the doctor," said old Stuart, with a twinkle full of malice in his eye.

"How dare you say such a thing to me—his wife!" cried Mrs Bolter, indignantly.

"Hoot! wumman; dinna be fashed!" exclaimed old Stuart, who seemed delighted to have roused a spirit of opposition in his friend's wife. "But I'll say this o' him," he continued, gradually growing more Scottish of accent; "he does keep gude whuskee. Ay, I was na' speaking o' him when I talked about lairge and sma' houses, but o' poor Perowne. Ay, but it's a bad job."

"What, about poor Helen?" said Mrs Bolter. "Ay, and his affairs. I suppose ye ken a'?"

"His affairs?" exclaimed Mrs Doctor. "What do you mean?"

"Oh! I thought a' Sindang knew he'd failed. Sax hundred pounds o' my money goes with the rest. But there, puir mon, he's in trouble enough wi' the loss o' his daughter, and I'll never say a word about it more."

"Is Mr Perowne in fresh trouble then, father?" said Grey, eagerly.

"Weel, my lassie there's naught fresh about it, for he must have expected it for a year or two. He's been going downhill a lang time, and noo he's recht at the bottom."

"Has he failed, father?"

"Joost ruined and bankrupt, my lassie, and Helen won't have a penny to call her own—a proud, stuck-up—"

"Hush, father! I cannot bear it," cried Grey, with spirit. "Helen Perowne is my friend and schoolfellow, and surely she is in trouble enough to ask our sympathy and not our blame!"

"Why, how now, lassie!" cried the old man angrily. "Ay, but ye're quite right," he said, checking himself. "We ought to pity them, and not jump upon 'em when they're down. Ye're quite recht, Grey, my bairnie—quite recht."

"Oh, Mr Stuart, how shocking; and just when he is so ill and cast down! Grey, my child, I must go and see if I can be of help to him. Will you stay with your father?"

"Ay, she'll stay, and you may too, Mrs Bolter, for Perowne has gone across to the Residency, and before now they're awa' up the river to try and find his poor lassie. Ye're quite recht, Grey, my child; and if they find her and bring her back, stop wi' her and comfort her, and do the best ye can. I'm sorry for them, for we're none o' us pairfect. But this is verra gude whuskee, Mrs Bolter. When do ye expect the Doctor home?"

"I don't know, Mr Stuart," she said, sadly. "Soon, I hope; but when he does come back he'll have to go after the expedition. It's very sad to be a doctor's wife."

"To be wife to some doctors," said old Stuart, laughing; "but not to our Bolter. Eh, but ye're a lucky wumman to get him. If ye hadn't taken him, I believe I should have made him marry my lassie here. There, I must be for going though, for my hands are full. I'm trying to save a few hundreds for poor Perowne out of the wreck."

"When shall I see you again, father?" said Grey, clinging to him affectionately.

"Oh, heaps o' times, my bairnie, when ye don't expect it. I'm always looking out after ye, but I know ye're all recht wi' Mrs Bolter here, so do all ye can."

He nodded and smiled as he went out of the room, but looked in again directly.

"Ye needna be uneasy you two," he said, "for I'm having a watch kept over ye both, though ye don't ken it; so go on joost as usual. If I hear of the doctor coming, Mrs Bolter, I'll let ye know."

They heard his steps in the veranda, and directly after saw his bent, thin figure out in the scorching sun, with no further protection than a bit of muslin round his old straw hat, and looking as if he were not worth fifty pounds in the world, and the last man to be the father of the graceful little maiden sitting holding Mrs Bolter's hand.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty One.

The Fire Burns Again.

Days of anxiety and watching, with no news of the expedition which had started directly after Grey Stuart's father had crossed over to the island. The English community at Sindang were extremely uneasy, for it struck them that the Malays were keeping aloof, and that their servants looked ill-conditioned and sulky.

A strange silence seemed to reign in the place, with an almost utter absence of trade. No boats came down with flowers and fruit, and no cheerful intercourse was carried on as heretofore. Nothing had been seen of the Inche Maida, and Murad was quite an absentee; while not a word had been brought down the river relating to the doings of the expedition.

In accordance with the Resident's secretly-issued orders, every European left stood in readiness to flee to the Residency island, where the little garrison, under the care of a subaltern, kept strict watch and ward, and held themselves prepared to go to the aid of the merchants and their families, should there be need.

But day after day glided by, and still no doctor—no news.

“Poor Mr Perowne!” said Mrs Bolter one afternoon, as she sat talking to Grey Stuart, and discussing the terrible state of his affairs, of which the merchant made no secret; “it will be a sad downfall for them; but there, there, merchants fall and rise again very quickly, and let’s hope all will come right in the end—Wasn’t that the doctor’s step, my dear?”

“No,” said Grey, quietly, as she tried to look free from uneasiness.

“I wish we could get some news, my dear,” sighed Mrs Bolter.

“All in good time,” said Grey, looking happier than she felt. “We shall hear soon.”

“I—I hope so, my dear,” sighed Mrs Bolter; “but it is very sad to be a wife, waiting as I wait.”

“But with patience now,” said Grey, smiling. “You are happy now in your mind?”

“Ye-s! Oh! yes I am now, my dear; and I will never let such thoughts gain an entrance again.”

“I know you will not,” said Grey, leaning towards her to lay her hand upon the little lady’s arm, in token of gentle sympathy, for the tears were in Mrs Bolter’s eyes, and she showed in pallor how deeply she was feeling the absence of husband and brother.

That day the little station appeared as it were asleep in the hot sunshine, and the silence was oppressive in the extreme. One of the Malays, who seemed to take an interest in Mrs Bolter, consequent upon his having been cured by the doctor of a very dangerous complaint, had been started up the river in his boat, to see if he could learn any news of the party, and this messenger was anxiously expected back.

“I can’t help it, my dear,” said Mrs Bolter, turning to Grey, after some hours’ silence, “I can’t help thinking that something serious is wrong. Oh! how shocking it would be to be deprived of our protectors!”

“But Dr Bolter has been away for longer at a time than this, has he not?” said Grey, as she sat there, wondering whether the officers of the expedition were safe—above all, Captain Hilton.

“Yes, my dear,” said the little lady, with a sigh; “he has been away longer before now; but no news of my brother—no news of him—it is very hard to bear.”

“No, no, no,” whispered Grey, passing a soft arm round her neck; “try and be patient—try and think hopefully of everything. We must be patient at a time like this.”

“But you cannot feel as I do, my dear,” cried Mrs Bolter. “You have friends away, but not one whom you dwell upon as I do.”

Grey’s eyes wore a very piteous aspect, but she said nothing, only did battle with a sigh, which conquered and fought its way from her labouring breast.

“But I am trying, Grey, my darling,” said the little woman, drying her eyes; “you know how patient I have been, and how I have taken your advice. Not one allusion have I made to the Inche Maida since you talked to me as you did. Now, have I not been patient?”

“You have indeed,” said Grey, smiling at her sadly.

“And I’m going to take your advice thoroughly, for I’m beginning to think that the little girl I began by patronising has grown wiser than I. There, you see, I have dried my eyes, and—Bless my heart, here is Mr Stuart, and he will see that I have been crying.”

She jumped up and ran out of the room as the little merchant came to the door, and entered without ceremony.

“Well, Grey, my bairnie,” he said, as she kissed him affectionately, while, as soon as he had drawn back, he took out his broad kerchief to dab his brow, and seemed to wipe the kiss carefully away.

“You have news, father?” cried Grey, eagerly. “Pray speak!”

“Well, don’t hurry me, child,” he replied. “I’ve just come from the landing-stage—and I’ve seen that Malay fellow, Syed—and he says the expedition is coming back.”

“Coming back, father? Oh! why did you not speak before?”

“Syed has just come down with the stream. The water’s low and they’ve got aground a few miles up, but they expected to be afloat soon.”

“But is anyone hurt, father? Have they found Helen? Pray—pray speak!”

“Only a few of the men a bit hurt, it seems. Officers all right,” said the old man, speaking very coolly, and consequently in excellent English.

“But Helen? Have they found Helen?”

“It seems not, from what the fellow knew,” said the merchant, coolly. “Where’s Mrs Bolter?” he said, in a low voice.

Grey's heart seemed to stand still. "Oh! father!" she sighed, "is he hurt?"

"No; he's aboard," replied the merchant. "But where is she?"

"She left the room as you came in; but why do you not speak out?"

"I was thinking o' Mrs Bolter, my dear. Isn't she a bit—you know—jealous, lassie?"

"Don't ask me such questions, father," cried Grey, in a low voice. "What do you mean?"

"I'm thinking she'll be a bit put out if it is as I hear."

"Why, father?" cried Grey, as her mind filled with strange imaginations. "But tell me quickly," she whispered, "is Mr Chumbley safe?"

"Yes, yes," said old Stuart; "he's safe enough, lassie."

"And—and—"

"The Resident? Yes; he's well."

"But father, you—you have not told me about Captain Hilton."

"Hilton? Oh, ay, he's all well! Hang it if here isn't that Barlow woman! I left her at the landing-place pumping Syed."

As he finished speaking, Mrs Barlow, panting, hot, and excited, half ran into the room.

"No news—no news of poor Mr Rosebury!" she cried; "but oh, my dear Mrs Bolter—my dear Mrs Bolter!"

"What is it—what is it?" cried that lady, opening the door, and entering the room, trembling visibly. "You've brought me some terrible news! I know you have! Speak to me—speak directly!"

"Yes, yes, my dear: but try and bear it with fortitude."

"Yes, I will," she panted. "My brother—is dead!"

"No, no," sobbed Mrs Barlow; "there is no news of him; but the Malay has told me all!"

"All? All what?" cried Mrs Bolter.

"They found Doctor Bolter at the Inche Maida's."

"I knew it!" cried Mrs Bolter, excitedly.

"And he and the Inche Maida have been up one of the little rivers in his boat, and the officers caught them, and brought them back."

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Two.

Help in Need.

If little Mrs Bolter had seen her lord—the quiet, suave medical man, who by his genuine admiration had so late in life won her heart—she would have trembled with the idea that he was about to fall down in a fit of apoplexy. For as he realised who was the showily-dressed Malay who had taken Helen Perowne in his arms, he first turned sallow with the heart-sinking sensation consequent upon seeing his helpless charge in the hands of one who, spite of his assumption of English manners and customs, remained at heart a fierce and unscrupulous savage.

But the next moment the pallor passed away, his face flushed with rage, and as his indignation increased, he became absolutely purple.

He made a furious struggle to escape from those who held him and get to Helen's side; for in those angry moments his English blood was on fire, and little, stout, short-winded, and pretty well exhausted by previous efforts as he was, he forgot everything but the fact that there was a helpless girl—an English lady—in deadly peril, and asking his aid. Numbers—personal danger—his own want of weapons—all were forgotten; and the little doctor would have attempted anything then that the bravest hero could have ventured to save Helen Perowne from her captors.

But it was not to be: one man, however, brave, when left to his natural strength of arm, is as nothing against a score; and literally foaming now with rage, Doctor Bolter, as he was mastered by the Sultan's men, had nothing left but his tongue for weapon, and this—let him receive justice—he used to the best of his power while Murad remained on deck.

Dog, coward, reptile, contemptible villain, disgrace to humanity, fiend in human form, scoundrel whom he would kick—these and scores of similar opprobrious terms the doctor applied to the Rajah, making the crew of the prahu scowl and mutter, and draw their krisses in a threatening manner, as they looked at Murad for orders to slay the infidel dog who dared revile their chief.

But in his calm triumph Murad stood gazing in a sneering irritating way at the doctor, speaking no word, but seeming

to say—so the doctor interpreted it:

“Curse and rail as you will, I have won, and no words of yours can hurt me.”

“Will nothing move you, dog that you are?” cried the doctor. “Oh, if I had but my liberty!” and his rage increased to such a pitch that his anger approached the ridiculous, for, failing English terms, he turned round and swore at the Rajah in Latin, in French, and finally rolled out a series of ponderous German oaths garnished with many-syllabled adjectives.

Murad seemed moved at last, and after calmly walking to and fro the bamboo deck, he suddenly turned upon the doctor.

“Silence, English dog!” he hissed; “or my men shall kris you, and throw you out!”

“Dog yourself!” roared the doctor. “Oh! if I had you sick in bed for twenty-four hours! I’d—”

“Silence!” roared Murad, fiercely, for he noted the ominous looks of his men, and felt that if he did not resent these insults he would be losing caste amongst them; and as he spoke he struck the doctor—bound and helpless as he was as to his hands, and held by a couple of the prahu’s crew—a violent blow across the mouth.

The doctor’s lip was cut, and the blood trickled down his chin as the Rajah turned contemptuously from him, and then staggered head first, and finally fell prone upon his face. For it was the only retaliation in Doctor Bolter’s power, and he took it: as the Rajah turned, the doctor threw all the strength he had left into one tremendous kick, as a scoundrel should be kicked, and the above was the result.

Furious with rage the Rajah struggled to his feet, whipped out his kris and dashed at the prisoner; but just then there was a warning shout, and a small sampan that had been coming rapidly down-stream hitched on to the prahu, and one of the occupants climbed on board.

He ran to the Rajah, and said something in a low voice which made Murad turn colour; and hastily thrusting his kris back in its sheath, he began to issue orders to his crew.

“I’m glad he didn’t kill me,” muttered the doctor; “I’m glad for Mary’s sake; but I’m not sorry I kicked the villain all the same. What are they about to do now?”

He soon learned, for the Sultan’s orders resulted in the prahu’s crew imitating his boatmen’s manoeuvre, running her close into the bank and under the shelter of the broad, overhanging boughs, the place being so well suited that even the large naga was entirely concealed.

As soon as these plans were being carried out, the doctor had been hurried—in spite of some resistance—into the after-part of the boat, where he was roughly thrown down upon the deck; but he knew from what was being done that help must be close at hand—and help of a substantial nature, or else the occupants of this large and well-armed craft would not have hidden and left the river clear.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “it may be meant as an ambush, and some of our friends are running the risk of capture.”

He felt lightened though at heart, and lay perfectly still—not in obedience to his captors, but to listen as he gazed straight up at the leaves and boughs above his head.

The time went on, and from being red hot with passion the doctor began to cool down; his heart had ceased to bound, and the burning sensation in his temples became less painful. He wondered where they had placed Helen, then whether there was any boat coming down the river; and at last, so still was everybody, so silent the leafy arcade, that the doctor’s natural history proclivities began to be even then aroused.

For as he lay there upon his back, first one and then another brilliant fly came and darted about through the network of sunrays; while soon after there was a beautiful bird perched upon a twig not ten feet from his face, where he could see the varied tinting of its feathers. Then, as it flew off, he saw what had alarmed it, and that it was not the crew of the boat, but first one and then another, till there were quite half a dozen monkeys of an extremely rare kind climbing and playing about in the branches of one of the biggest trees. Then came close to him a wonderfully-tinted parrot, and then a lustrous sunbird began to dart about in an open space.

“If I only had my gun,” muttered the enthusiast; and then he was listening intently to the beat of oars.

The doctor’s thoughts were interrupted the next moment by some one kneeling down beside him, and he saw the gleaming eyes and white teeth of Murad, who drew the doctor’s attention to a bare kris which he held in his hand, and then pointed at his prisoner.

“Look!” he whispered; “if you make a sound while that boat goes by, I shall kill you as I would a dog!”

“Thankye,” said the doctor, quietly; and he lay still thinking.

There was help coming—help for him and for the poor girl whom he had sworn to protect. If he let that help go by he would be resigning Helen Perowne to a fate worse than death; and growing enthusiastic as he thought, he mused on, telling himself that he was an Englishman and very brave, and that he’d die sooner than not make an effort to save the poor girl in his charge.

Then he shuddered as he thought of death, and felt that he would like to live longer at any cost, and that he dare not risk his life; but directly after he began comforting himself with the idea that if matters came to the worst, and he did

call for help, the chances were great against Murad striking him in a vital place.

"And I can cure a wound," he muttered; "and as to poison on those krisses, it's an old woman's tale."

All this time the sound of the oars had come nearer and nearer, till to the doctor they seemed to be just abreast.

But no; they were still coming nearer, and his heart began to beat furiously, as, taking advantage of Murad's head being turned, the doctor freed his hands from their bonds and then lay thinking.

Should he risk it? Should he give it up?

Life was very sweet. So was honour; and that poor girl had claimed his protection.

"And how could I look her father in the face if I did not try my best to save her?" he thought.

Still the sound of oars came nearer—*beat, beat—beat, beat*; and now he knew that the boat must be nearly abreast—so plainly did the plashing sound.

He looked up at Murad, who, kris in hand, was listening and watching together. He glanced at the dull-hued wavy blade, and saw its keen point and edge, thinking with a kind of curiosity how wide a wound it would make in him as he recollected how many he had cured for the men who had been in engagements; and then he asked the question again:

"Should he risk his life for Helen's sake?"

The sound of the oars was louder than ever; and now he knew that the boat must be really abreast—and an English one too—otherwise why this hiding and the Rajah's anxious look?

"Not only for Helen's sake, but as an Englishman's duty," he said to himself; and he drew a long breath.

"*Help!*" he roared, "*help! boat ah!*"

He would have said "*Ahoy!*" but with a snarl like that of a wild cat, Murad threw himself upon his prisoner, striking savagely at his breast with the keen weapon, to pin him to the naga's bamboo deck.

But with the effort of a man striving to save his life, the doctor managed to wrench himself a little on one side, and the keen kris passed between his breast and arm as he seized the Rajah by the throat.

The struggle that followed was almost a matter of moments, before Doctor Bolter went over the side, plunging down into deep water, and rising outside the screen of leaves, to swim vigorously towards the English boat, which was coming rapidly towards where the Rajah's naga lay.

A spear splashed into the water by the doctor's head, but the boughs prevented the thrower from taking a good aim; and almost directly after the swimmer was hauled on board, and the Rajah's naga was seen to be trying to steal out some fifty yards ahead.

A call to surrender was answered by a shout of defiance, and the Malays began to manfully ply their oars; but a volley from the soldiers' pieces seemed to quell their ardour and to cause confusion, in the midst of which the English boat dashed alongside, and Hilton, Chumbley, the Resident, and a score of the soldiers poured over the side, driving the spear-armed crew below, the Rajah going down from a cut over the forehead from the Resident's sword.

The naga was mastered; and the doctor, hunting out where Helen had been placed, she was soon afterwards sobbing in her father's arms.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Three.

The Return to Sindang.

For a time no one spoke in the doctor's cottage; but old Stuart took a very large and a very loud pinch of snuff, which seemed as if he had been loading his nose with powder, for it went off directly after with a report-like sneeze that made the jalousies rattle.

"Is—is this—these words—are they true?" said Mrs Bolter, at last, with unnatural calmness.

"Yes, yes, my dear, quite true!" cried Mrs Barlow, excitedly.

"Did—did you hear anything of this, Mr Stuart?" said Mrs Bolter, in a low, constrained voice.

"Well, I did hear—am I to tell you?"

"Yes—everything," replied Mrs Bolter, now perfectly cool and calm.

"I heard that the doctor had been found up the river somewhere with a black lady in his boat; but I didn't hear it was the Inche Maida."

"But my heart told me it was," muttered poor little Mrs Bolter, whose good resolutions were all swept away by her agonising feeling of jealousy. Then aloud, with a fierce look of anger, but speaking in quite a hoarse whisper, "Go!"

she said, pointing to the door. "You wicked woman, go! You have taken delight in coming to tell me this!"

"No, no!" cried Mrs Barlow, bursting into tears; "it was from friendship—from the sisterly love I have for you! It was for your brother's sake!"

"If—if ever my brother returns, he shall never speak to you—bad, weak, wicked woman that you are! Leave my house!"

"But, Mrs Bolter—dear Mrs Bolter—"

"Leave my house!" continued the little woman in the same low, excited whisper; and she seemed to advance so menacingly upon the merchant's widow, that she backed to the door in alarm, and regularly fled.

"Dear Mrs Bolter—" began Grey.

"Don't speak to me, my dear," said the little lady. "I'm not at all angry. I'm perfectly calm. There, you see how quiet I am. Not the least bit in a passion."

Certainly she was speaking in a low, passionless voice, but there was a peculiar whiteness in the generally rather florid face.

"But the news may not be true," pleaded Grey; "and even if it is, what then? Oh, Mrs Bolter, pray think!"

"Yes, my dear," said the little lady, "I have thought, and I'm quite calm. I shall suffer it, though, no more. I shall wait till my dear brother is found, and then I shall go straight back to England. I shall go by the first boat. I will pack up my things at once, and get ready. You see I am quite calm. Mr Stuart, you have always been very kind to me."

"Well, I don't know, not verra," said the old Scot; "but ye've been verra good to Grey here."

"I'm going to ask a favour of you, Mr Stuart."

"Annything I can do for ye, Mrs Bolter, I will."

"Then will you give me shelter with Grey here for a few weeks?"

"Or a few months or years if ye like," said the old man, taking a liberal pinch of snuff; "but ye needn't fash yourself. You won't leave Harry Bolter."

"Not leave him?" said the little lady, with forced calmness.

"Not you, for I don't believe there's aught wrong. It's a bit patient he's found up the river, and if it isn't, it's somebody else; and even if it wasn't, ye'd just give him a bit o' your mind, and then you'd forgive him."

"Forgive him?" said Mrs Bolter; "I was always suspicious of these expeditions."

"Always," assented old Stuart. "He has told me so a score of times."

"Then more shame for him!" cried Mrs Bolter; "How dare he! No, Mr Stuart, I am not angry, and I shall not say a word; but I shall wait till my poor brother is found, and then go back to England."

She sat down very quietly, and sat gazing through the window; while old Stuart went on taking snuff in a very liberal manner, glancing from time to time at the irate little lady, to whom Grey kept whispering and striving to bring her to reason.

This went on for a good hour, till Grey was in despair; when suddenly Mrs Bolter sprang to her feet, red now with excitement, as she pointed through the window.

"Am I to bear this?" she said, in the same whisper. "Look, Grey! Look, Mr Stuart! You see! He is coming home, and he is bringing this woman with him!"

Grey started, for there indeed was the doctor, leading a closely-veiled Malay lady, apparently walking slowly and leaning heavily upon his arm.

Old Stuart took another pinch of snuff, and made a good deal of noise over it, as a cynical smile began to dawn upon his face; and he watched little Mrs Bolter, who drew herself up and stood with one hand resting upon the back of a chair.

"What can I say to her?" murmured Grey to herself. Then softly to Mrs Bolter:

"Pray listen to him: it is only some mistake."

"Yes, my dear, I will listen," said Mrs Bolter, calmly; and then she drew a long catching breath, and her eyes half-closed.

Just then the doctor threw open the door, and carefully led in his companion.

"Ah, Grey, you here!" he cried. "Back again. Mary, my love! I've brought you a surprise."

He dropped his companion's hand, and she stood there veiled and swaying slightly, while he made as if to embrace

his wife.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, as she shrank away.

"Don't—don't touch me," she cried, in a low, angry voice, "never again, Bolter; I could not bear it!"

"Why, what the—Oh, I see! Of course! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs Bolter stared at him fiercely, then at his companion, as in a curious, hasty way, she tore away her veil with trembling hands, revealing the swarthy skin and blackened and filed teeth, seen between her parted lips; her hair dark as that of the Inche Maida, and fastened up roughly in the Malay style. She was trying to speak, for her bosom was heaving, her hands working; and at last she darted an agonising glance at Grey Stuart, who was trembling in wonderment and fear.

The next moment the stranger had thrown herself at Mrs Bolter's feet, and was clinging to her dress, as she cried hysterically:

"Mrs Bolter—Grey—have pity on me! You do not know?"

"Helen!" cried Grey; and she flung her arms round her schoolfellow, as Mrs Bolter uttered that most commonplace of common expressions—

"Oh! my goodness, gracious me!"

"Yes, Helen Perowne it is, my dears," said the little doctor, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "I think I found Solomon's Ophir this time, eh?"

"Henry!—Henry!" panted Mrs Bolter; "what does this mean?"

"Mean? That you haven't given me a kiss, my dear! Never mind the company. That's better," he cried, as he took the kiss—audibly.

"But you don't explain, Henry."

"Explain, my dear," said the doctor, softly, as he pointed to where Helen lay with her face buried in Grey Stuart's breast. "Nothing to explain; only that I was up one of the rivers and found the lost one here before the expedition came. But didn't I say so, Stuart, old fellow? It was Murad, after all."

A low moan from Helen made Mrs Bolter dart towards her.

"Oh! my child, my child! and to come back to us like this!" cried Mrs Bolter, helping Grey to place Helen upon the couch, the tears running down her cheeks the while; and all dislike to the station beauty seeming to have passed away as she took the swarthy head to her bosom, and knelt there, rocking herself softly to and fro.

"Can we do anything to help, doctor?" said old Stuart, in a whisper.

"No: let 'em all have a good cry together. Nature's safety valve, old fellow," said the doctor, coolly.

"Then I propose that we just go and leave 'em. What do you say to a pipe in the surgery?"

"And a cool draught of my own dispensing, eh?" said the doctor, with his eyes twinkling. "One moment, and we will."

"But where's Perowne?"

"Upset! Lying down on board the naga, and too ill to come. I brought her on to the women as soon as I could."

He trotted across to his wife. "That's right, little woman!" he said, squeezing Mrs Bolter's arm. "You'll be a better doctor now than I. She's very weak and low and—" He whispered something in her ear.

Poor little Mrs Bolter turned up her face towards him with a look full of such horror, misery and contrition that he was startled; but setting it down to anxiety on Helen's behalf he whispered to her that all would soon be well.

"Take her up to the spare room, dear," he said, in a whisper. "You must not think of sending her home. You'll do your best, eh?"

"Oh! yes, Henry," she said, as she looked at him again so piteously that he forgot Grey's presence, and bent down and kissed her.

"That's my own little woman, I knew you would," he said. "I don't think you'll want me; but if you do, I'm in the surgery. Well, little Grey, what do you want—news?"

Grey's lips said "yes" without a sound.

"Well, everybody's all right except a few scratches, and I'm choked with thirst."

Five minutes after he was compounding draughts for himself and the old merchant from a large stone bottle and *aqua distil.*, as the druggists call it; while soon after, over what he called a quiet pipe, he told his adventures to his friend.

It was just about the time when, as Helen's swarthy head lay upon the cool white pillow in the bungalow spare room, Mrs Bolter poured some cool clear water into a basin, and then dropped in it a goodly portion of aromatic vinegar, which with a sponge she softly applied to Helen's fevered brow.

Grey held the basin and a white towel, while Mrs Bolter applied the sponge once—twice—thrice—and the weary, half-fainting girl uttered a low moan.

Again Mrs Bolter applied the cool soft sponge to the aching temples, and then, as there was no result but another restful sigh, interrupted this time by a sob, she applied the sponge again after a careful wringing out, still with no effect but to bring forth a sigh.

This time poor Mrs Bolter, who had learned nothing from her lord, took the towel, for she could not resist the temptation, and softly drew it across Helen's brow, as the poor girl lay there with closed eyes.

The towel was raised from the swarthy forehead, and Mrs Bolter looked at it, to see that it was white as it was before.

This time she exchanged a look of horror with Grey, down whose cheeks the tears flowed fast, as she leant forward and kissed Helen's lips.

"No, no, don't touch me," she moaned, but Grey held her more tightly.

The sobs came fast now as two dark arms were flung round Grey's white neck, and Mrs Bolter's eyes grew wet as well, as she drew a long breath, and then sat down by the bedside, saying, softly:

"Oh! my poor girl!—my poor girl!"

Helen heard it as she felt Grey's kisses on her lips; and as she realised that there was no longer cause for dread as to the reception she would receive, her tears and sobs increased for a time, but gradually to subside, till at last she lay there sleeping peacefully—the first sleep of full repose that she had slept since the eventful night of the *fête*.

It was not to last, though, for when, an hour later the doctor came softly up, and laid a finger upon one throbbing wrist, his brow contracted, and he shook his head.

"Is there danger, doctor?" whispered Grey, softly, startled as she was by his manner.

"I fear so," he whispered; "she has gone through terrible trials; fever is developing fast, and in her condition I tremble for what may be the end."

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Four.

Neil Harley's Prophecy.

The circumstances were so grave, that directly after the return of the Resident's boat with the prisoners and the captured naga, special communication was sent to the seat of the Straits Government, and pending a reply to the despatch, the Residency island was placed thoroughly in a state of defence.

The Europeans in Sindang held themselves in perfect readiness to flee to the island for safety at a moment's notice; and every man went armed, and every lady went about as a walking magazine of cartridges, ready for the use of husband or friend.

They were troublous times, full of anxieties, without taking into consideration the cares of the sick in body and mind.

The prisoners were secured in the little fort on the island, where Murad preserved a sulky dignity, remaining perfectly silent; and whenever an attempt was made to question him about the chaplain, he either closed his eyes, stared scornfully at his questioners, or turned his back.

Rigid watch and ward was kept, the men's pouches were filled with ball-cartridges, and every one fully expected an attack from the people of Sindang, to rescue their Sultan, and avenge the insult of his being placed in captivity.

Among other preparations, the doctor set Mrs Bolter to work to scrape linen for lint in case of the demand exceeding the official supply; but somehow the days glided on, and there was no need for it, not a shot being fired, not a kris or spear used. The people ashore looked gloomy and taciturn, but offered no violence.

On the contrary, they seemed disposed to make advances to the daring, conquering people, who had not scrupled to seize their chief and keep him confined—they, a mere handful of people amongst thousands.

The fact was, they were completely cowed, knowing, as they did, how easily help could be procured, and how formidable that help would be.

But the English at the station could not realise this. They only knew that they were dwelling upon a volcano which might at any time burst forth and involve them in destruction; the military portion feeling certain that sooner or later an attempt would be made to rescue the Rajah.

The days glided by, and the topics of conversation remained the same—another week had passed and there had been no attack.

How was Miss Perowne—had anyone seen her?

Was she never to be "Fair Helen" again?

Was it true that the Rajah had made a daring attempt to escape?

Had the Inche Maida sworn to rescue him, and was she coming down the river like a new Boadicea, with a hundred water war-chariots to sweep the British invader from the land?

Was Helen Perowne dying, and had Mr Perowne died in the night?

These are specimens of the questions that were asked, for the little community was in a perfect ferment. The loveliness of the weather, the brilliant days and delicious nights passed unnoticed, for everyone was intent on danger alone.

It was, then, a matter of intense relief to hear, time after time, that the manufactured dangers were merely the fictions of some of the most timid; and though the rumour was again and again repeated that the Inche Maida was coming, she did not come, but remained quiescent at her home, truth to say, though, with boats manned and armed, not for attack, but ready to take her and her chief people to a place of safety, should the English visit her with inimical intent. She had sinned against them, and could not know how chivalrously Chumbley had kept the matter secret and prevailed upon his friend.

Meanwhile, in the midst of these anxieties, when rumour ran riot through the place, and the more nervous shivered and started at every sound, and took no step without feeling that a kris was ready to strike, Helen—the main cause of all the station troubles—lay happily unconscious of what was passing.

For Doctor Bolter was right; the excitement had borne its seeds, and after her system had bravely battled with disease for a time, fighting it back during all the most trying of her adventures—no sooner was she in safety at the station, than it claimed its own, and she lay now at the doctor's cottage sick unto death.

Never had sufferer more devoted attention than that which Helen received from her old schoolfellow and Mrs Bolter; while the doctor himself was in almost constant attendance, watching each change, and denying himself rest in his efforts to save the life that seemed to be trembling in the balance.

"This is a pleasant place to have brought you to, Mary," he said, more than once. "It was a shame! but I never could foresee such troubles as this; and after all, I am not so very sorry."

"Not sorry?" she replied.

"Well, of course, my dear, I am awfully sorry about the way in which Arthur is missing; but as to myself, one does get very selfish in middle-age."

"Selfish? Is this a time to talk of being selfish?" said the little lady, reproachfully.

"Well, perhaps not," the doctor replied; "but really I'm glad I've got you here, Mary, for I don't know what I should have done without you. You're a perfect treasure."

Mrs Doctor looked pacified, and worked harder than ever.

"Here, I generally bring you bad news," said old Stuart, coming in one day to see his nurse, as he called Grey, who had become a permanent dweller at the cottage, "but I've got some good for you this time."

"What is it?" said the doctor. "Have they found Rosebury?"

"No; but you need not be so nervous any more, for here is a gun-boat coming up the river."

Boom!

"There it is announcing itself," said old Stuart, with a chuckle. "That's the sort of thing to keep the natives in awe, a great gun like that."

The coming of the powerful war-steamer with reinforcements, and a tender in the shape of a swift despatch-boat, did act as a repressing power, and silenced for good any latent ideas of rising against the English; and in obedience to the despatch received by the Resident, Murad and a couple of his officers were at once placed on board under a strong guard; and, within an hour of the arrival of the steamer and the despatch-boat, he was on his way to Singapore to take his trial.

There was no attempt at resistance, the prisoners meeting their fate in a stolid, indifferent way, while after a short consultation at the Residency, the crew of the Sultan's boat were brought out from the fort and questioned.

To a man they denied all knowledge of the whereabouts of the chaplain; and when offered their liberty on condition of his being found, they calmly accepted their position, and expressed their readiness to go back to prison.

Harley was the president of the little court; and at last he addressed them, and offered them their liberty on another condition.

"Murad will never return here," he said, "and you are clear of all allegiance to him. I am empowered to offer you your freedom if you will all swear henceforth to serve the English Government."

They all brightened up at once, and expressed themselves ready to obey.

"Then you are free," said the Resident; "you can return to your homes."

The men stared. They could not believe in such clemency; but no sooner had they realised the fact, than their stolid, sulky look was exchanged for one of extravagant joy, and their delight after having resigned themselves to death knew no bounds.

"Now," exclaimed the Resident, "tell me at once—where is the chaplain?"

Only one man spoke:

"We do not know, my lord."

"Is—is he dead?"

"Why should he be dead, my lord?" said the man. "Why should Murad kill him? No; he had reasons, and we know that he had him taken away with the lady—that is all."

"But where did he imprison him?"

"Allah and our lord the Sultan only know," said the man, impressively. "Murad was wise. When he made plans it was in his own mind, and he told them to none but the slaves who were to do his bidding. Let us free, and we may perhaps find the Christian priest. If we do, we will bring him back."

There was nothing more to be done, and the station was relieved of the presence of a danger that seemed imminent so long as Murad was there.

The time glided on, and still there was no news of the chaplain. The Inche Maida's home had been visited again and again, but she either did not know or would confess nothing, preserving a studied dignity, and seeming to be neither friend nor enemy now; while, this being the case, the chaplain's absence began to be accepted as a necessity, and there were days when Mrs Barlow was the only one who mourned his loss.

"It's mind—mind—mind," said the doctor, as he came out of Helen's room, over and over again; and the questioner he addressed was Neil Harley. "It's mind, sir, mind; and until that is at rest, I see no chance of her recovery. Medicine? Bah! it's throwing good drugs away."

The constant attention went on, and as almost hourly the Resident or one of the officers came to inquire, there seemed to be times when Doctor Bolter did not know whether Helen or her father would be the first to pass away. He was constantly going to and fro; and after many days of suffering, when Sindang had pretty well sunk into its normal state of quietude, and Helen's fever began to subside, it left her so weak that the doctor threw up his hands almost in despair.

"It lies with you two now, more than with me," he said to Grey and Mrs Bolter; and with tears in their eyes, they were compelled to own their helplessness as well.

It was on one of the hottest and most breathless days of the tropic summer, that, with her eyes red, and weary with long watching, Grey Stuart sat in her old school-companion's chamber, thinking of the changes that had taken place since that morning when Helen and she were summoned to the Miss Twettenhams' room regarding the levity displayed, as the ladies called it, towards Helen's first admirer.

Fair Helen then—now she looked more like a native woman than ever, with her piteous great eyes gazing wildly at her friend, as if asking her for help.

But that she had wept till the fount of her tears seemed dry, Grey could have thrown herself sobbing at Helen's side; now she could only take her wasted hand and try to whisper some few comforting words.

"Has Mr Rosebury been found?" she exclaimed, suddenly; and on being answered in the negative, as she had been fifty times before, she wrung her hands and sobbed wildly.

"My fault—my cruel fault!" she cried, in a weak, high-pitched voice; "you will all curse me when I am dead."

"My child—my dear child," sobbed Mrs Bolter; and then, unable to contain herself, she hurried from the room, and Grey strove to calm the excited girl. She had tended her constantly, telling herself that it was a duty; but the task had been a bitter one, for ever, in the hours of Helen's delirium, she had listened to her wild words as she spoke constantly of him and his love, reproaching him for not coming to save her from Murad, and neglecting her when she was praying for him to come.

Grey felt a pang at every word; and as Helen spoke in this way, she recalled the tender scenes she had witnessed, and the young officer's infatuation with her beauty.

And now on this particular day her trial seemed to be harder than ever, for suddenly Helen turned her weary head towards her, and clasping her hands with spasmodic energy, she whispered:

"Grey, I have been cruel and hard to you, I know. I stood between you and your love—but you forgive me now?"

"Oh, yes, yes, that is all past and gone!" cried Grey, excitedly.

"Yes, yes, that is all past and gone, and now you will do this for me. I think I am going—I cannot live long like this—tell him, then, quickly—tell him I must see him—tell him that he must come."

Grey's heart sank within her, and she rose slowly from her seat, and loosed the two thin hands she had held. It was like signing her own death-warrant to send this message, for if Captain Hilton did not know of her wanderings, and this, Helen's last wish, he—who was, perhaps, forgetting more and more his love—would hardly dwell upon it again. To do this was to revive it, for she told herself that Hilton would be too generous not to respond.

But Grey Stuart was a heroine—one of those women ready at any sacrifice of self to do a duty; and she turned to go just as Mrs Bolter entered the room.

"What is it—what does she want?" whispered the little lady eagerly.

"Helen wishes to see—" began Grey, in a choking voice.

"Yes, yes, I must—I will see him, to humble myself before I die!" moaned Helen.

"Will you—send at once," panted Grey, with her hand pressed upon her side, for she could hardly speak the words—"send for Captain Hilton to come?"

She forced the words from her lips, and then sank back in her chair with a blank feeling of misery upon her, to gather force to enable her to flee from a house where she told herself that she could no longer stay.

It was but momentary this sensation, and then she uttered a sob, and the tears began silently to flow, for she heard Helen say, in a quick, harsh, peevish voice:

"No, no, you mistake me! I want Mr Harley quick, or—too late!"

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Five.

The Summons.

Neil Harley's troubles had of late been great. He had gone on striving to be matter-of-fact and business-like, telling himself that he must be calm and cool; but all the same he suffered bitterly.

It had been a great shock to him, the disappearance of Helen; and though her recovery had followed, it was in such a guise that at times he felt half maddened, and as if his troubles were greater than he could bear.

He had loved her from the first; and though he had laughed at and bantered her, treating her numerous flirtations as trifles unworthy of his notice, at the same time he had suffered a terrible gnawing at the heart, and every glance sent at Hilton—every whispered compliment paid to her by the handsome young captain—caused him acute pain.

Time after time he had striven to tear himself from what he felt was a hopeless, foolish attachment; and when he made the effort, Helen's beautiful face rose before him with a sly, half-mocking, half-reproachful look, and he knew that he was more her slave than ever.

The mishaps that had befallen the various prisoners seemed to recoil upon him, to increase his troubles. He felt, as it were, to blame, and often asked himself if it was not due to his want of clever management that the chaplain had not also been recovered; but for his comfort there were times when he was fain to confess that it would have puzzled the cleverest diplomat to have dealt differently with so wily a Malay as Murad, or with his people, who were ready to hide everything from the English intruders upon their land.

"I ought to be in better heart," he said to himself, as he sat thinking in his cool room at the Residency; "three out of my four lost sheep are back, and I have hopes of the fourth. But Helen?" His face grew contracted and wrinkled as he sat thinking of the swarthy face and disfigured mouth of the belle of the station, and wondered whether, in spite of his declarations to the contrary, there was any attachment left between Hilton and the suffering girl.

"No," he said; "none. Hilton is quite honest. His was but a changing love for the bright, handsome face and deep, dreamy eyes. He does not care for her now. What man would?"

There was a pause here, and he sat dreamily gazing through the open window at the silver shimmering of the river.

"What man would love Helen Perowne now?" he said, softly; "now that she comes back with such a social stigma upon her, just rescued from the hands of this Eastern sensualist—changed! ah! how changed! Poor girl—poor girl! What English gentleman would hold out his hand to her now, and say to her, 'Helen, love! my own! Will you not be my wife?'"

Another pause, broken only by the loud insect-hum from the blossom-laden trees outside the window.

What man would say this to her now?

"I would!" he cried aloud; "for is mine so mean and paltry a love that it is to be checked and turned aside by her misfortune? No; let her but ask me—as I said she some day would ask me—with look or lip, to come, and I should be at her side—for I so love her, in spite of all, and with my whole heart!"

For a moment the abject, frightened face that he had for a few moments seen shrinking from him before its owner concealed it with her trembling brown fingers, when she was transferred from the Sultan's to his own boat, was there before him; when Helen had uttered a loud, piteous cry as she recognised one of her deliverers. The next moment that scene upon the river, vividly as it was impressed upon his mind, with the swarthy Malays, the prostrate prince,

the brilliant sunshine flashing from the river, even as he could see it now, and the dark shadows of the drooping trees, all had passed away, and in place he saw only Helen—the Helen of his love—prostrate upon her bed of sickness, dull of eye, shrunken and thin with fever, suffering and helpless. And as he asked himself, “Did he love her still?” he rested his elbows upon his table, his face went down upon his hands, and with a low moan he felt that he was cruel and wanting in his love for being away from her at a time like this, when he ought to be showing her how true and fervent was his feeling—that it was no light fancy of the young and thoughtless youth, but a strong man’s true and lasting love.

He did not hear the matting-screen drawn aside, nor heed the light step of his Chinese servant, as he softly entered the room, and then stopped short, as if afraid to interrupt his master as he slept.

It was an important message, though, that he had to give, and he went up to the table.

“Master,” he said, softly; but the Resident did not move.

“Master!” said the man again; but the Resident heard him not, for he was dwelling upon the tidings that he had received an hour before, that Helen’s case was utterly hopeless, and that though she might live for days or weeks, her recovery was impossible.

It was on good authority that he received those sad tidings, for they were from Dr Bolter’s lips; and he had to listen, with a composed and placid mien, when all the time he had felt as if he could have thrown himself upon the floor, and torn himself in the bitterness of his anguish.

If he could have been allowed to sit at her pillow, holding one poor wasted hand, he told himself that he could have borne it better, and watched her with patient hope. But he was shut out from her resting-place—from her heart! She had never cared for him, and his words to her had been but an empty vaunt. And yet he loved her so well, that as he thought of all the past and the bitter present, he felt that when Helen died he dared not face the empty present, and something seemed to whisper to him, would it not be better to seek in oblivion for the rest that his heart told him he should never know.

“Master!”

Louder now, and a hand was laid upon his arm.

The Resident started up, and gazed angrily at the intruder upon his sacred sorrow—so fiercely that the servant shrank away.

“What is it?” cried the haggard man, harshly. “Is—she—dead?”

“A messenger, master, from Miss Stuart,” said the man, shivering still from the wild face and mien.

“I knew it—” moaned the Resident.

“To say, will you go directly to the doctor’s house.”

Neil Harley started from his chair; and then he staggered, and caught at the table for support.

“The heat!” he said, huskily—“giddy!—a glass—water!”

The servant went to a great cooler standing in the draught of the window, and filled and brought a glass of the clear, cold fluid.

“Thanks!” said the Resident, drinking feverishly, and recovering himself. “Who brought the message?”

“Yusuf, the Malay. His boat waits,” replied the man; and making an effort to be calm, the Resident took up his sun-hat, and walked firmly down to the landing-stage, where he was ferried across and then walked up to the doctor’s cottage, overtaking Hilton on the way.

“You going there?” he said.

“Yes,” replied Hilton. “I was going up to ask how Miss Perowne was now. Were you going there?”

“Yes,” said the Resident, bitterly; “I was going there. Were you sent for too?”

“I? No; it was not likely. Pray disabuse your mind, Harley, of all such thoughts as that! There is nothing between Miss Perowne and me.”

“Not now that she is in misery and distress!” retorted the Resident, and his voice sounded almost savage in its reproach.

Hilton flushed angrily.

“Your reproaches are unjust,” he said. “You know that Miss Perowne never cared for me, and that I was too weak and vain not to see it earlier than I did. Harley, I will not quarrel, for I esteem you too well. We ought to be good friends.”

“And we are,” said the Resident. “Forgive me for what I have said!”

He held out his hand, which the other pressed warmly.

"I'm an outsider!" said Hilton, bitterly, in turn. "I'm going to set up for my friend's friend. I shall be best man to Chumbley when he marries Miss Stuart; and so I shall to you, for I believe you will marry Helen Perowne after all."

"Silence, man!" cried the Resident, harshly. "I have been sent for by Miss Stuart. Her friend is dying, I am sure. Perhaps it is best!"

"Dying!" cried Hilton.

"Yes! Are you surprised after what the doctor has said?"

"I am," said Hilton; "for I had hopes after all. Let us make haste."

The Resident glanced at him quickly, for Hilton's words even then caused him a jealous pang; but there was nothing but honest commiseration there; and they walked on hastily to the doctor's door.

Dr Bolter himself met them, looking very grave, and the faint hope that had been struggling in Neil Harley's breast died out.

The doctor saw the question in each of his visitors' eyes, and answered, hastily:

"No; I don't think there is immediate danger, but—She expressed a wish to see you, Harley."

That *but*, and the way in which he finished his sentence, spoke volumes. An invalid in a dangerous state expressing a wish to see some one in particular! It was like the cold chill of death itself seeming near.

"You may go in, Harley," said the doctor. "My wife and Miss Stuart are there."

The Resident hesitated for a moment. Then drawing a long breath, he walked through the drawing-room, and into Helen's bedroom, seeing nothing but the thin swarthy face upon the white pillow, about which was tossed her abundant hair.

Mrs Bolter rose as he entered, and taking Grey Stuart's hand, they softly moved towards the door, and left the room without a word.

For a few moments Neil Harley stood there, gazing down at the wasted face before him, his very soul looking out, as it were, from his eyes, in the intensity of his misery and despair; while Helen gazed up at him now with a saddened and resigned expression of countenance, the vanity all passed away and the dread that he should see her, disfigured as she was, a something of the past.

"I sent for you to ask you to forgive me," she said, in a low, faint voice; but he did not speak.

"I know now how weak—how vain I was—how cruel to you; but—you know—my folly, you will forgive?"

He was down upon his knees by her bedside now, and the words seemed to be literally torn from his heart as he groaned:

"Helen!—Helen! my poor girl! has it come to this?"

"Yes!" she said, softly, "it seems like rest! I am happier now; but I thought—I should like to see you again—to say Good-bye!"

"No, no, no!" he cried, passionately. "You shall not leave me, Helen! My love—my darling—you shall not die!" She smiled faintly.

"I knew you loved me differently from the rest!" she said, softly, as he clasped her thin hand and held it to his lips; "that is why I sent. You said I should send for you—some day."

"To ask me to take you for my wife," he panted; "and, Helen, the time has come!"

"Yes," she said, softly, "but it was the Helen of the past; not this wreck—this—this—Oh, Heaven!" she moaned, passionately, "did I sin so vilely that you should punish me like this?"

"Hush! hush!" he whispered, passing his arm beneath her light, too fragile form, and raising her till her head rested upon his breast. "That is all past now, and it is not the Helen of the past I love, but she who has sent for me at last. Helen, darling, speak to me again!"

"Speak?" she said, faintly; "what should I say, but ask you to forgive me, and say good-bye?"

"Good-bye?" he cried, frantically. "What, now that I have, as it were, begun to live?"

"One kind, forgiving word," she said, faintly. "One? A thousand!" he panted; "my own—my love! Leave me? No, you shall not go! Is my love for you so weak and poor that I should let you go—that I should turn from you in this hour of trial? Helen!" he cried; "I tell you it is not the Helen of the past I love, but you—you, my own! Tell me that you have turned to me—truly turned to me at last, and live to bless me with your love!"

Her lips parted, and she tried to speak, but no words came. Her eyes closed, and as he clasped her more firmly to his breast a faint shuddering sigh seemed to fan his cheek.

"You shall not die," he whispered, as he raised her thin arm and laid it tenderly round his neck, while his heart

throbbed heavily against hers; "I am strong, and my strength shall give you strength, my breath should be yours, Helen, love, were it my last. Take it, darling, and breathe and live, my own—my wife—my all!"

As he whispered frantically these words he seemed endued with the idea that she would draw life from his strong manliness, and breathe it in his breath, as he bent down lower and laid his lips upon hers.

Then the shuddering sigh came again, and feeble as she was before, he felt her relax and sink away; her arm fell from where it rested on his shoulder, and in an agony of dread he stamped upon the floor.

There was a hurried rush of feet, the door was flung open, and the doctor entered the room.

"Quick!" he cried. "Lay her down, man!—That's well."

"Is—is she dead?" groaned the Resident; and in an agony of remorse and despair he sank back in the chair by the bedside, as he saw the doctor take one hand in his and lay his other upon his patient's throat.

"No," said Dr Bolter, shortly. "Fainting. Go away."

"But, Bolter—" protested the Resident.

"Be off, man, I tell you!" cried the little doctor, angrily, showing how thoroughly he was autocrat of the sick room. "Go, and send in my wife, and Miss Stuart. Or no: my wife will do."

The Resident bent down once over the thin, dark face, and then stole softly out of the room, to find Mrs Bolter waiting; and nodding quickly, she went in and closed the door.

"What news?" asked Hilton, eagerly, as he rose from a chair near the window.

"I don't know—I dare not say," replied Harley, sinking hopelessly into a chair; and for a time no one spoke.

It was the doctor who broke the silence by coming back from the sick room, and this time sending a thrill of hope into the breast of all as he began to rub his hands in an apparently satisfied manner, and gazed from one to the other.

"Is—is she better, doctor?"

"Don't know! won't prognosticate!" he said, sharply. "I'll say that she's no worse. Prostrated by mental emotion, but other symptoms at a standstill. If she lives—well, if she lives—"

"Yes, yes, doctor!" cried the Resident, imploringly.

"Well, if she lives, I think it will be from some sudden turn in her mental state, for I have done all I know, and of course a man—even a medical man—can do no more."

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Six.

More Mating.

Slow work—terribly slow work; but at the end of three days—during which at any moment it had seemed as if the light of life would become extinct—Helen Perowne still lived, and in place of Grey Stuart or Mrs Bolter, Neil Harley was mostly by her side.

She suffered still from wild attacks of delirium, and in her wanderings, if the firm, strong hand of the Resident was not there to hold her, she grew plaintive and fretful, and a look of horror appeared upon her wasted face; but no sooner did she feel Neil Harley's firm clasp and hear his whispered words, than she uttered a sigh of content, and dropped always into a placid sleep.

To his surprise and delight, these words seemed to pacify her; a long-drawn sigh came from her breast, and she fell into a restful slumber.

During the rest of the critical time of her illness a few whispered words always had the desired effect, and from that hour Helen began rapidly to mend.

"Yes, she is improving fast now," said the doctor, as he sat beside her bed talking, as if he believed his patient to be asleep. "I shan't take any of the credit, Harley. I should have lost her, I am sure, for it was not in physic to do more than I had done. There, I am going down now to my specimens, to have a look at them, and talk to my wife, for I have hardly seen her of late."

He rose and left the room, and the Resident took his place, seeing that the great dark eyes were fixed upon him, full of a strange, pathetic light, that the warm evening glow seemed to give an almost supernatural effect.

"You are awake, then?" he said, softly.

"Yes; I heard all that he said, and it is true."

"Thank heaven!" said the Resident, fervently, as he took one of the thin brown hands from the white coverlet and held it in both of his.

"I believe it was your tender words that gave me hope," said Helen, softly. "Now it is time to take them back."

"Take them back?" he exclaimed, wonderingly.

"Yes; take them back. Do you think I could be so weak and cruel as to let you be burdened for life with such a degraded thing as I?" she cried; and she burst into so violent a fit of sobbing that the Resident grew alarmed; but he must have possessed wonderful soothing power, for when Mrs Bolter came in a short time after, it was to find Helen Perowne's weary head resting upon Neil Harley's arm, and there was a restful, peaceful look in her eyes that the little lady had never seen there before.

Helen did not move, and the Resident seemed as if it was quite a matter of course for him to remain there, so little Mrs Bolter went softly forward and bent down to kiss her invalid as she called her, when she was prisoned by two trembling weak arms, and for a few minutes nothing was heard but Helen's sobs.

When Mrs Bolter went down soon afterwards to sit with the doctor, she said, softly:

"I never thought I could like that girl, Henry, and now I believe I almost love her."

"That's because she has changed her colour," said the doctor, with a hearty chuckle.

"Oh! that reminds me," cried Mrs Bolter; "I wanted to ask you about that."

"About what?" said the doctor, looking up.

"About the black stain. Will she always be like that?"

"Pooh, nonsense! my dear. It is only a stain, which has thoroughly permeated, if I may so term it, the outer skin. Soon wear off, my dear—soon wear off."

"But her teeth, Henry?"

"Come right in time, my dear, with plenty of tooth-powder; all but the filing."

"But that is a terrible disfigurement."

"Oh, that will go off in time. The teeth are always growing and being worn down at the edges; but what does it matter? she is ten times as nice a girl as she was before."

"Yes," said Mrs Bolter, thoughtfully; "and now, Henry, if I could only have my mind set at rest about Arthur, I believe I should be a happy woman."

"Then we'll soon set your mind at rest about him," said the doctor. "I never felt that I could leave you till Helen was safe from a relapse."

"Leave me, Henry!" cried the little lady.

"Only for a time, till I have found Arthur."

"Then you do think he will be found?"

"I am sure of it. Why, who would hurt him, the best and most inoffensive of men?"

"Surely no one," said Mrs Bolter, with a sigh.

"Of course not. I've tried to get something out of Murad, but my messengers have failed; but all the same, I feel sure he knows all about it, and burked Arthur for a reason of his own."

"But what reason could he have?" cried Mrs Bolter.

"Well, I'll tell you my theory, my dear, and it is this: he meant to silence all Helen's scruples by marrying her according to our rites."

"Do you think so?"

"I do; and that is why he secured Arthur. If it was not so, it was because he was in the way. Anyhow, we can get nothing from the rascal, so I mean to go up the river again. I have my plans working."

"But, Henry!"

"Only to try and find him; for Harley's and Hilton's men have made a miserable failure of it all."

Mrs Bolter sighed, but she made no opposition; and then further conversation was ended by the arrival of Grey Stuart with Hilton, both looking so satisfied and happy that Mrs Bolter exclaimed: "Why, whatever now!" The doctor chuckled, and cried: "Oh! that's it, is it! Oh! Grey! I thought you meant to be a female old bachelor all your life!"

"I have persuaded her that it is folly," said Hilton. "But I always thought it was to be Chumbley!" cried the doctor. "Here, I say, this is a horrible take-in."

"I thought the same, doctor," said Hilton, smiling; "and have been making myself very miserable about what is a

misconception, though Grey here owns to thinking Chum the best and truest of men.”

“And I’m sure he is!” cried Mrs Doctor, enthusiastically.

“Here, I say!” cried the doctor, banging his hand down on the table, “this won’t do! Am I to sit and hear a man praised to my very face?”

“Yes,” said Mrs Bolter, quickly; “if it is Chumbley; and if Grey had chosen with my eyes, she would have taken him instead.”

“But she did not choose with your eyes, my dear,” said the doctor, smiling; “and she was wise?”

“And why so?” cried Mrs Bolter, tartly.

“Because she saw what a bad one you were at making a choice, my dear. Look at me for a husband, Miss Stuart; this was the best she could do.”

“Oh, Henry! for shame!” cried Mrs Doctor. “There! I’ll say no more, only that I hardly forgive you, Hilton; and I tell you frankly that you have won a far better wife than you deserve!”

“Then I’m sure we shall be the best of friends over it, Mrs Bolter!” said Hilton, merrily, “for I have been repeating that sentiment almost word for word.”

“There, there, there—the young people know best,” said the doctor. “I congratulate you both; and I must be off now to see Perowne. But here is somebody coming. Mrs Barlow, I believe.”

“Henry, pray say I’m out!” cried Mrs Bolter, starting up. “I really cannot meet that woman to-day!” and she made for the door.

“It’s all right. Don’t go, my dear; it’s only Stuart,” said the doctor, chuckling.

“And you said it was that horrible Mrs Barlow on purpose to frighten me! It’s a very great shame—it is indeed!”

“Ye’re right, Mrs Bolter,” said the little dry Scotch merchant, appearing in the doorway; “it is a great shame! After all my care and devotion, and the money I have spent in her education, here’s this foolish girl takes a fancy to a red coat, and says she shan’t be happy without she marries it!”

“Pray, pray, papa! No, dear father, don’t talk like that!” said Grey, crossing to him, as he took a chair, and resting her hand upon his shoulder.

“Oh, but it’s enough to make any man speak!” he cried. “I suppose it’s natural though, Mrs Bolter?”

“Of course it is, Mr Stuart; and if Captain Hilton undertakes to make her a good husband, why you must be very thankful.”

“Humph! I suppose so; but mind this; you can’t be wed till the chaplain’s found! Ha! ha! ha! I say, doctor, that will stir up Hilton here!”

“We are making earnest efforts to find him without that,” said Hilton, warmly.

“Oh, are you?” said the old merchant. “Well, look here, just a few business words in the presence of witnesses before I go up to Perowne, for I promised to go and smoke a pipe with the poor fellow, who’s as sick in body as he is in pocket and mind.”

“I’m going there, and we’ll trot over together,” said the doctor.

“Verra good,” said old Stuart. “So now look here, Master Hilton, commonly called Captain Hilton, you came to me to-day saying that you had my child’s consent to ask me to give her to you for a wife.”

“Yes, sir, and I repeat it.”

“Well, I sort of consented, didn’t I?”

“You did, sir.”

“Good; but once more—you know I’m a verri poor man?”

“I know you are not a rich one, sir.”

“That’s right, Hilton. And you ken,” he continued, getting excited and a little more Scottish of accent—“ye ken that when puir Perowne failed, he owed me nearly sax hundred pounds?”

“I did hear so, sir.”

“Well, I meant to give little Grey here that for a wedding-portion, and now it’s all gone.”

“I’m glad of it, sir,” cried Hilton, warmly, “for I am only a poor fellow with my pay and a couple of hundred a year besides; but in a very few years’ time I shall be in the receipt of another two hundred and fifty a year, so that we shall not hurt.”

Grey crossed to him, and put her arm through his, as she nodded and smiled in his face.

“Ye’re a pair o’ feckless babies!” cried old Stuart. “So ye mean to say ye’ll be content to begin life on nothing but what ye’ve got, Hilton?”

“To be sure, sir! Why not?”

“To be sure! Why not?” said Mrs Bolter. “I don’t approve of people marrying for money, Mr Stuart; and I’m glad they act in so honest a spirit! Do you know, Mr Hilton, I began my life out here hating Helen Perowne, and thoroughly disliking you; and now, do you know, she has made me love her; and as for you, I never liked you half so well before, and I wish you both every joy, and as happy a life as I live myself when Henry stays at home, and does not glory in teasing me in every way he can!”

“Thank you, Mrs Bolter!” cried Hilton, warmly. “I don’t wonder, though, that you should dislike me, for I did not show you a very pleasant side of my character.”

“Well,” said old Stuart, rising, “you and I may as well be off, doctor. Poor Perowne will be glad to hear you chat a bit about Helen; and as for you two young and foolish people, why—ha! ha! ha! you had better make friends with the doctor. He has always been petting my little girl; now’s the time for him to do something a little more solid.”

“I’m sure,” said Mrs Doctor, warmly, “Grey shall not go to the altar without a little dowry of her own—eh, Henry?”

“To be sure, my dear!” said the doctor—“to be sure!”

“Nay, nay, nay!” cried old Stuart, showing his teeth; “hang your little dowries! I want something handsome down!”

“Oh, father!” cried Grey, turning scarlet with shame.

“You hold your tongue, child! I want the doctor to do something handsome for you out of his findings at Ophir—Solomon’s gold, Bolter. Ha, ha, ha!”

“Laugh away!” cried the doctor; “but I shall astonish you yet!”

“Gad, Bolter, ye will when ye mak’ anything out o’ that!” cried the little merchant. “Don’t let him run after shadows any more, Mrs Bolter. Well, Hilton, my boy, I won’t play with you,” he said, holding out his hand, as he spoke now, with Grey held tightly to his side, and the tears in his pale blue eyes. “I’m a pawkie, queer old Scot, but I believe my heart’s in the right place.”

“I’m sure—” began Hilton.

“Let me speak, my lad!” cried the old man. “I always said to myself that I should like the lad who wooed my little lassie here to love her for herself alone, and I believe you do. Hold your tongue a bit my lad! I’ve always been a careful, plodding fellow, and such a screw, that people always looked upon me as poor; but I’m not, Hilton: and thank Heaven, I can laugh at such a loss as that I have had! Heaven bless you, my lad! You’ve won a sweet, true woman for your wife; and let me tell you that you’ve won a rich one. My lassie’s marriage portion is twenty thousand pounds on the day she becomes your wife, and she’ll have more than double that when the doctor kills me some day, as I am sure he will.”

“Mr Stuart!” cried Hilton.

“Hold your tongue, lad—not a word! Good-night, Mrs Bolter. Doctor, old friend, if you don’t take me up to Perowne’s, and prescribe pipes and a glass o’ whuskee, I shall sit down and cry like a child.”

He was already at the door, and the doctor followed him out, leaving Hilton, as he afterwards told his old companion, not knowing whether he was awake or in a dream.

But he was awake decidedly, as Mrs Bolter could have told, for dream-kisses never sound so loud as those which he printed on the lips of his future wife.

“Oh, it’s all right!” said Chumbley; “and I wish you joy! I knew the little lassie loved you months ago!”

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Seven.

For Another Search.

“By Jove, we’ve forgotten all about the parson!” exclaimed Chumbley. “What’s become of him?”

“I say, Chumbley, old fellow, we must be getting into a terrible state of mind to go on like this without troubling ourselves about our chaplain—Here comes the doctor.”

“And Harley not far behind.”

“Doctor ahoy!” shouted Chumbley.

“Well, lads—well, lads,” cried the little doctor, bustling up. “What news?”

"That's what we were going to ask you, doctor. What next?"

"Why, now, my dear boys, that the troubles are about over, my principal patient quite safe, and people seem settling down, with no enemies to fear, it seems to me just the time for making a fresh start up the river."

"To—"

"Exactly, my dear Chumbley; to take up the clue where I left off when I found Helen Perowne, and go on and discover the gold-workings."

"The gold-workings, doctor?" cried Hilton, wonderingly.

"To be sure, my dear fellow. Mind, I don't say that Solomon's ships ever came right up this river; but they certainly came here and traded with the Sakais or Jacoons, the aboriginals of the country, who worked the gold from surface-mines and brought it down to the coast."

"Cut and dried, eh, doctor?" said Chumbley. "Dried, of course, my dear fellow. I don't know about the cut. I feel more and more convinced that here we have the true Ophir of Solomon; and it only wants a little enterprise, such as I am bringing to bear—"

"But you don't mean to say," cried Hilton, "that you are going off on another expedition of this sort, doctor?"

"Indeed but I do, sir!"

"And what does Mrs Doctor say?" asked Chumbley. "Does she approve?"

"Of course, my dear boy. Don't you see that I am combining the journey with one in search of my brother-in-law?"

"Oh," said Hilton, drily, "I see.

"Harley's people are back without any news, and my little wife is distracted about it; vows she'll go herself if I don't find him. And then there's that Mrs Barlow. I was up all night with her. Hysterical, and shrieking '*Arthur!*' at intervals like minute-guns."

"She has started a devoted attachment to the chaplain, hasn't she?" asked Chumbley.

"Dreadful!" replied the doctor. "It makes me think that the poor fellow is best away, for she certainly means to marry him when he comes back. I say Chumbley, you're a big fellow!"

"Granted, oh, wise man of the east."

"You have no income?"

"The munificent pay awarded by Her Majesty's Government to a lieutenant of foot, my dear doctor, as you perfectly well know."

"Exactly," continued the doctor. "And you would not be afraid of a widow?"

"No, I don't think I should."

"Then marry Mrs Barlow. She is to be had for the asking, I am sure; and she has a nice bit of money. It would be a catch for you, and relieve poor Arthur Rosebury from further trouble."

"Hilton, old man," said Chumbley, solemnly, "do you think there is a crocodile in the river big enough to receive this huge carcass of mine?"

"Doubtful," said Hilton, laughing. "I agree with you, Hilton! it is doubtful. But sooner would I plunge in and be entombed there than in the affections of Barlow. No, doctor, if you have my health at heart, you must prescribe differently from that. I say, though, don't you take it rather coolly about the chaplain?"

"Coolly? Not I, my dear fellow; but how can a man like me sit down and snivel? Here am I watching Helen Perowne one day, her father the next; then up all night with Billy—I mean Mrs—Barlow; without taking into consideration the calls to Private Thomas Atkins, who has eaten too much plaintain and mangosteen, and thinks he has the cholera; Mrs Ali Musto Rafoo, who is in a fidget about her offspring; and all the livers of the European residents to keep in gear. I say I have no time to think of anything."

"But Solomon's gold mines," said Chumbley.

"Get out with your chaff!" cried the doctor. "But seriously, I have got hold of that fellow Yusuf, and he tells me he thinks he can find the chaplain, and I am just off. I couldn't help the allusion to the gold."

"But you think it lies somewhere up-country?" said Chumbley, seriously.

"Sure of it, my dear boy!" cried the doctor, eagerly; "and I shall of course use every effort to find Rosebury: but to be honest, it would be unnatural if I did not look out for the great object of my thoughts at times."

"What, the chaplain?" said Hilton.

"No, the Ophir gold mines," said the doctor, seriously; "but really it is a great trouble to me, this disappearance of my

brother-in-law. You couldn't go with me, could you, Hilton?"

"I go? No, I'm afraid not, doctor."

Chumbley gave a curious start at this, but was immovable of aspect the next moment.

"It's my belief," he said quietly, "that when you come to the point and find the chaplain, it will be where the doctor wants to get to so earnestly."

"What do you mean?" cried Dr Bolter.

"Depend upon it he has discovered Ophir, and is sitting upon the gold. That's why he does not come back?"

"You don't think so, do you?" cried the doctor, earnestly.

"Well it is possible," replied Chumbley. "What do you say, Harley?" he continued, as the Resident strolled up.

"Say about what?"

"I tell the doctor that I think Rosebury has discovered Ophir, and that is why he does not come back."

The Resident smiled.

"My dear doctor," he said, "when do you start?"

"To-morrow morning at daybreak."

"And you will take three or four men with you—say a sergeant and three privates?"

"Thanks, no," said the doctor; "but I should like one soldier with me if I can take my pick."

"I will answer for it that you may."

"Then I want Chumbley."

"Oh, I'll go with you!" cried the latter. "Where do you mean to go first—to the Inche Maida's district?"

"No," cried the doctor; "what is the good of going there? You know she has had the place well searched, and turned sulky, and holds aloof from us now."

"Yes," said Chumbley, exchanging glances with Hilton, "I know that. Of course she is annoyed about Murad."

"Of course," said Hilton frankly, "she does not like being suspected of connivance with the Rajah for one thing, and feels as well that at such a time as this her presence would be out of place and awkward."

"It is a pity too," said the Resident, "for I would rather be on good terms with so enlightened a woman."

"Sore place," said the doctor, in his quick, offhand way; "give it time and keep it healthy, and it will soon heal up. The Inche Maida fancies we are suspicious of her. Wait a bit, and send her a little present, and then an invitation. I would not be in too great a hurry. Wait till the Murad business has all settled down, and she has seen that we are not going to usurp her land."

"Yes," said Hilton; "I think the doctor is right."

"Sure I am," said the doctor. "Diagnosed the case. Bless your hearts, before long her serene highness will have the vapours, or cut her finger, or chew too much betel, or something or another, and then she will send for yours truly, Henry Bolter, and all will be plain sailing again. Well, Chumbley, will you come with me?"

"Yes, doctor, on two conditions," replied Chumbley.

"Firstly?" said the doctor.

"That I get leave. It's too much trouble and worry to desert."

"Granted," said the doctor. "Eh, Harley. Eh, Hilton?"

"Granted," said the Resident.

"Granted," said Hilton.

"That disposes of firstly," said the doctor. "Now then secondly?"

"That you swear not to mention Ophir more than once; and Solomon's ships seeking gold, and apes, and peacocks more than once in each twenty-four hours," said Chumbley.

"Come, that's fair," said the Resident, laughing.

"Quite fair," cried Hilton, roaring with laughter.

"Oh, hang it, I say! Come, that is too hard a condition," said the doctor, tilting his sun-hat on one side so as to get a

good scrub at his head.

"Shan't go without," drawled Chumbley.

"Say twelve hours—once in each twelve hours," protested the doctor. "I couldn't promise more."

"Would you stick out for the twenty-four?" said Chumbley, very seriously. "I hate being bored."

"Oh, I think I'd meet him," said Hilton, laughing. "Poor fellow, he can't help it."

"Well, I'll give in," said Chumbley; "only mind this, you are to take your best cigar-box, doctor—not those confounded manillas, but the havanas—and you are to pay a fine of a cigar every time you break out."

"Agreed," said the doctor, holding out his hand, and the expedition was settled, the doctor going off with the Resident, leaving the two young officers together.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Eight.

A Find—Not Gold.

"I say, Hilton, old fellow, I liked that," drawled Chumbley.

"Liked what?"

"Why the way in which you smothered up all your old resentment against that poor woman. You know you were breathing out fire and slaughter against her when we got away."

"Well, I was angry then, and mortified, and troubled."

"And now it's all balm, and oil-olive, and honey, eh, old fellow? The beating, bounding heart at rest."

"Don't be an idiot!"

"Why not? The ways of wisdom are hard, and cold, and thorny. Folly is pleasant sometimes."

"You don't think so."

"Indeed I do. You heard what an idiot I was in throwing up that Barlowesque chance?"

"Was that meant for a pun on burlesque?"

"I didn't mean it," said Chumbley. "Take it so if you like. But I say, old fellow, I am glad that you have smoothed down about the Inche Maida."

"Weak, silly woman!" cried Hilton. "Oh, I don't know. It was her foreign way of looking at her chances. These people are regular gamblers. Look at those two fellows there fighting those gamecocks. I'll be bound to say they are staking their all upon the event!"

"Likely enough. That scoundrel Murad staked his all and lost!"

"Heavily," said the lieutenant. "The Princess staked heavily too, and lost; but thanks to you, she comes off pretty easily except in the disappointment. You bury that affair, of course?"

"Yes, of course! It is impossible to avoid it!"

"Agreed," said Chumbley. "Well, I'm glad you kept it down; it would have made us so very ridiculous. I'm off now to have a nap, and then to get ready my gun and things for the journey to-morrow."

"I don't know that I should care to go with you," said Hilton.

"Won't be bad. I shall sit back in the boat, and rest a good deal I daresay. Old Bolter will talk me to sleep, safe. Ta-ta."

"Good-bye, old fellow;" and the young men separated, Chumbley for his quarters, Hilton to go and seek out Grey.

The next morning at daybreak, after infinite cautions from Mrs Bolter, the doctor prepared to start.

"Is there anyone who ought to be seen—anyone you remember?" said the little lady.

"No one but the Barlow woman. You might drop in there," replied the doctor.

"Oh, no, Henry; really I could not," said Mrs Bolter, wringing her hands.

"Never mind, then. She won't hurt. She said, as soon as she knew I was going, that she should die if I did not bring Arthur back. I say, my dear, it's almost enough to make one say one wishes he may never come."

"Oh, Henry!" cried Mrs Bolter. "I'd sooner suffer a dozen Mrs Barlows than Arthur should not be found!"

"Very well, then, I don't come back without him," said the doctor.

"Henry!"

"If I can help it," he replied; and for the next few moments any one might have taken them for a gushing young couple of eighteen and twenty-three before they tore themselves apart, and the doctor hurried away.

Love is an evergreen. Only give it fair treatment, and the leaves will never fall.

"Come, doctor," roared Chumbley, as the little man approached the boat. "Do you call this daybreak?"

"Yes, broad daybreak!" said the doctor, chuckling; and the next minute the boat was under weigh, with Yusuf and a crew to use the poles for punting over the shallows.

The desire was strong in the doctor to devote himself a good deal to the pursuit of his hobby, but he sternly put it down.

"No, Chumbley," he said, "not this time. I'm a weak man, and I talked to you about Sol—ahem!—about my hobby, eh? Didn't say it that time—and if we come across anything relating to Oph—I mean my hobby—why, well and good, we'll investigate it; but I mean business; and Yusuf here has given me good hopes of being successful, for of course it is absurd to imagine that they have killed poor old Arthur!"

"What do you propose doing first, then?" said Chumbley, rousing himself from a drowsy contemplation of the banks, and thinking how pleasantly life would glide on in a place like this.

"I think I shall leave Yusuf to follow his own bent," replied the doctor. "He is a close, dry fellow, but he seems to know a great deal, and he will not speak till he is sure. That is it, is it not, Yusuf?"

"Yes, master," said the Malay, who was toiling hard with the doctor's old boatman Ismael. "If I said to the chiefs I know where the Christian priest is, and took them to the place and he was not there, they would be angry. So I will take them to the place I think of. If the Christian priest is there, it is good. If he is not, the misfortune is not so bad, and the chiefs will not be so hard upon their guide."

"Well, Ismael, what have you to say?" said the doctor, as he caught his old boatman looking at him very intently.

"I was thinking of the lives of all here, master," said Ismael. "We do not wish to die, we people of the country; but when the time comes we say 'Yes, it is our fate, and we close our eyes;' but you English chiefs, it is not right that you should die. We love the doctor, for he is good to us, our wives and children."

"Oh, all right," said the doctor, heartily. "What do you mean? You are afraid there is risk?"

"Great danger, master!" said Yusuf. "Murad will surely have us hunted out and slain for showing you his secret house in the jungle!"

"Another secret house, eh?" said Chumbley, rousing himself a little more. "Well, look here, old Cockolorum."

Yusuf seemed to consider this a title conferring a dignity, for he smiled gravely and bowed.

"And you too, old Beeswax," continued Chumbley, addressing Ismael, who seemed disappointed at Yusuf getting all the honours, but who now smiled and bowed as well. "You think that Murad will come down on you both for betraying his secrets?"

"It is not betraying, master," said Yusuf. "We have found the place, and we show it to you. Murad did not trust us."

"All right," continued Chumbley. "Well, let me tell you this, that by this time Rajah Murad, or the Sultan as you call him, is safe under lock and key."

"Thy servant does not understand," said Yusuf.

"The chief means he is shut up in a little box with the key in his pocket," interpreted Ismael, gravely.

"That will do," said Chumbley, smothering a laugh. "He is safe in prison, and you will never see him here again."

"It is enough," said Yusuf. "The English are my masters, and I trust to them that their servant shall not have the kris."

"Now then, how long have you known of this place?"

"Two days, master: a friend told me that his brother was there as guard, but he knew no more."

"And you will take us there?" said Chumbley.

"Straight if the chief commands," said Yusuf; and the boat was urged forward.

It was on the second day that the little boat was turned into the stream that had become familiar to the doctor, and he exclaimed at once:

"This won't do. I know of that place. The chaplain is not there."

"No, not there," said Yusuf. "We shall see."

The doctor gave a grunt of satisfaction, half an hour later, when, instead of following the windings of this minor stream, the sampan's head was suddenly turned towards a dense mass of tall reeds, and the men paddled with all their might, driving the boat through the water-growth, and after a hundred yards of rough progression, they passed into a large lagoon, dotted with patches of a kind of lotus, and with other water-plants sufficiently beautiful to drive the doctor into raptures.

"But no," he exclaimed; "I will not be tempted to botanise any more than I will be to look upon the spots where Sol—I mean—that is—"

"I say, doctor, we've been out over twelve hours," drawled Chumbley, "and you haven't yet said it once. Let it go."

"Solomon's ships came in search of gold!" cried the doctor, as if relieved.

"Well, they didn't come here, doctor, or they would soon have been aground."

"No: of course not," said the doctor; "but what I mean is, that I will not yield to my hobby this time until poor Arthur Rosebury is found. I promised his sister, and I'll keep my word."

That lagoon, or rather chain of marshy lakelets, extended for quite fifty miles, sometimes spreading wide, more often dwindling into little openings and ponds united by narrow passages with hardly a perceptible stream. Along this chain the boatmen dexterously sent the little vessel, sometimes forcing it aground, and often having hard work to get it through the dense vegetation that rose from the swampy soil.

Two days were spent in getting to the end of the lagoon; and landing upon an elevated place, they encamped for the night, the doctor chatting for long enough about the beautiful specimens that they had passed, and which he had refrained from touching.

"There is a remarkable flora in this region, Chumbley," he said, enthusiastically.

"I daresay there is," said Chumbley, sleepily; "but your wife doesn't want us to be taking back a remarkable flora, but a matter-of-fact Arthur. Go to sleep, man, and let's rest."

The doctor told him he had no soul for science.

"Not a bit, doctor. Good-night;" and the great fellow was asleep in an instant.

"We are very near the place now," said the guide, as they partook of a hearty breakfast, Yusuf having speared some of the fish that abounded in the waters near.

"But we've got to the end of the lake," said the doctor.

"Yes, master; and now we must walk."

The way proved to be a long and toilsome journey, through the stifling heat of the jungle, which was here tolerably open, and so full of specimens attractive to the doctor that he fidgeted with disappointment at having to pass them by. He, however, resolutely refrained from attempting to collect, and only forfeited one cigar by the time that, after their weary tramp, gun in hand, the guide pointed to a low palm-thatched house, within a strong bamboo palisade, which protected a garden.

"Who'd have thought of finding a house here?" said Chumbley, who began to think of the Inche Maida's hiding-place, to which this was very similar. "But where is the pathway?"

"On the other side, master. I brought you all round this way so as not to alarm the guards. They might have taken their prisoner farther into the jungle where he could not be found."

A short consultation was held, and then Chumbley's proposal was carried in opposition to the more timid one of the guide's.

Chumbley's was the very soldier-like one of draw and advance.

This they did, the men with their spears, and Chumbley and the doctor double gun in hand; and after a little struggle with nothing more dangerous than canes, they forced their way round to the front of the place and entered, to find everything just as if it had been inhabited an hour before, but neither prisoner nor guards were there.

"The birds are flown," said Chumbley, after they had searched the half-dozen airy rooms that formed the place.

"Yes," said the doctor, "but he has been here. Look!"

He pointed to a couple of long shelves made by placing bamboos together, and upon them, carefully dried, were hundreds of botanical specimens, laid as only a botanist would have placed them.

There was the chance of the prisoner returning, but it hardly seemed probable; and after some hours waiting, it was decided to return to the boat, to pass the night there, and return the next day.

The tramp back seemed harder than the advance; but they persevered, and at last, soaked with perspiration and utterly wearied out, they came in sight of the lagoon head, where Chumbley uttered a sigh of satisfaction.

"I wonder what's for dinner," he said. "Eh?"

He turned sharply, for Yusuf uttered an ejaculation, and stood pointing to where, seated in an opening and leaning against a tree, was the figure of a man, ragged, unshorn, and looking the picture of misery.

"Hurrah?" shouted Chumbley, dashing forward, the doctor panting after him; but the figure did not move, seeming to be asleep with its head drooped forward upon its breast.

"Rosebury!" cried Chumbley—"Rosebury!" but there was no reply.

"Arthur!" cried the doctor, sinking on one knee beside the haggard, hollow-cheeked figure, and changing the position so that its head rested upon his arm.

"Dead?" whispered Chumbley, in awe-stricken tones.

"He would have been in an hour!" cried the doctor. "Quick! your flask. There, that will do—a few drops with water. That's right. Now soak a biscuit well. Crumble it up, man—quick, in the cup."

A few drops at a time were poured between the parched lips, and as Arthur Rosebury showed signs of revival, a little of the soaked biscuit was administered; while Yusuf and Ismael rapidly cut down grass and contrived a rough bed, upon which the suffering man was laid.

"Is it fever?" said Chumbley, gazing down at the hollow cheeks and wild, staring eyes that had not a spark of recognition therein.

"The fever that men have who are starving," cried the doctor. "Poor fellow! he has not had food for a week."

It was after three days' camping out beside the boat in a rough shanty which the Malays built up, that the Reverend Arthur Rosebury came round sufficiently to be able to recognise and talk to his friends.

"It's fortunate for you, old fellow, that you had a doctor to find you," said Bolter. "For—I say it without boasting—if I had not been with Chumbley, you would never have seen Sindang again."

"And shall I now?" was said in a feeble voice.

"To be sure you will, and the sooner the better," said the doctor. "I want more nourishing food for you, so we'll make up a couch in the stern of the boat, and then get on towards home."

"I'll try and bear being moved," he said feebly, "but—but—but—"

"But what?" said the doctor, quietly. "There, don't worry. I see. You have forgotten what you wanted to say. It will come again. Shut your eyes and go to sleep."

Arthur Rosebury was so pitifully weak that he was ready to obey anybody; and he sank back and seemed to go to sleep at once with the doctor and Chumbley seated by his side.

"I want some explanation of all this," said Chumbley, in his drawling way.

"So do I," said the doctor; "but we must wait, my dear boy. He's as weak as water, and I can't trouble him with questions. You see, his brain is affected by his bodily want of tone; but it will soon come right if we are patient."

It seemed to the chaplain as if he had not been asleep when he awoke five hours later, and looking at the doctor he went on where he ceased before dozing off; but this time he did not forget.

"Where is Helen Perowne?" he asked.

"Safe at home," replied the doctor.

"That is well," said the chaplain. "I have been troubled by a dreamy idea that she was carried off when I was by the Malays, and that I was kept to marry Helen to someone else."

"What someone else?" said the doctor.

"I fancied it was Murad," said the chaplain, feebly; "but my head *is* confused and strange. What of Mary?"

"Quite well, and anxious to see you again. There, lie back, and we will lift you in this waterproof sheet so gently that you will hardly know you have been moved."

The chaplain lay back, and seemed to drop asleep again as he was lifted into the boat, which put off at once; and in high spirits with the successful termination of their quest, the Malays worked well, and sent the sampan skimming over the still waters of the lagoon.

They did not cease poling and paddling all night, and halted at last to land, after catching some fish, which, when broiled, made a good addition to the biscuits and coffee.

The chaplain ate heartily, and seemed to enjoy the warm sunshine as they went on again over the sparkling waters of the lake. He talked, too, and asked Chumbley to sit by him, but seemed to have very little memory, till all at once he cried, in a piteous tone:

"My specimens!—my specimens! We must not leave them behind!"

The doctor took off his hat and rubbed his head, for his feelings were quite with the chaplain; but to go back and land, and search the house in the jungle, meant over a day's work, and he said, decidedly:

"No: it is impossible to go now!"

"But they are the work of weeks and months of labour!" protested the chaplain. "If you had only seen them!"

"My dear Arthur, I have seen them," said the doctor. "They will not hurt, and as soon as you are well again we will fetch them."

The chaplain sank back in his place with a sigh; and as the journey was continued he told his friends of his long imprisonment, and of how, as a resource, he had settled down to botanising.

This had gone on steadily, till about a fortnight back, when he noticed that his guards were whispering together a good deal, and that evening he missed them, and no meal was prepared.

The next day no one was visible, and he found what provision there was, and did the best he could, and so on the next day, when, finding that he was regularly deserted, he made up his mind to escape, and started off, following the track that led from the house, to find that it ended by a little river.

There was no possibility of getting to right or left, to follow the stream, on account of the jungle, and after a weary day he was glad to go back to his prison and sleep.

The following days were taken up in efforts to find a path that would lead to some inhabited place, but the efforts were in vain; and though he sought constantly, he could not retrace his steps to the house where he had seen the Malay lady trying to get away. Everywhere it was jungle—a wilderness of jungle—and the only possibility of escape was by one of the streams, or by way of the lagoon, which he had discovered in his botanical wanderings.

He had no boat, nor the ingenuity to contrive one. To have attempted to wade down a stream meant courting death by the reptiles; so the chaplain's many wanderings in the wilderness took him over the same ground day after day, and always back to his prison.

Then the scant supply of provision was exhausted; there was no fruit to be found; he had no gun, and could contrive no means of capturing fish; and the result was that, growing weaker day by day, and more helpless, he realised how safe was the prison in the jungle in which he had been shut up; and at last sat down, to gradually sink into a stupor, from which, but for the coming of his friends, he would never have recovered.

Even when he was taken in safety to the landing-stage, he was too feeble to walk, and fainted as he was carried to his brother-in-law's house.

Volume Three—Chapter Twenty Nine.

Amok!

Singapore on a sunny day, looking bright, attractive, even wonderful to stranger eyes. Ships of all nations in the harbour, with sailors from Europe, from America, from the ports about the Red Sea, from India, China, and Japan.

A wonderful polyglot assembly rubbing shoulders in the street: Jack in his white duck frock, straw, and loose trousers, staring at John Chinaman, with his blue cotton garments, pith-soled shoes, and pigtail reaching almost to the ground. Swarthy Dyaks, Papuans, Bugis, and Malays pure and Malays mongrel from the many islands of the Eastern seas, every opalescent-eyed, swarthy savage wearing his kris. British soldiers mingled with the native police in their puggrees; and busy English merchants, and many Scotch, hurried with the varied races on their way to and from their places of business.

Above all, the Chinese seemed to muster strongly—those busy, patient, plodding people, who are ready to squeeze themselves into any vacant hole, round or square, and to make themselves fit therein. Barbers, carriers, purveyors of fruit, washers of clothes, shampooers, tailors, cooks, waiters, domestic servants, always ready, patient and willing, childlike and bland—John Chinaman swarms in Singapore, and can be found there as the meanest workman or artisan, up to the wealthiest merchant or banker, like the late Mr Whampoa, whose gardens were one of the lions of the place.

Everything looked at its best in the pure air and under the brilliant sky; and Hilton and Chumbley were on their way to meet Mr Harley, who, now that Helen Perowne had been pronounced quite out of danger, had come down with a lighter heart to be present at the trial of the Malay chief Murad, who was to be tried by a jury of his fellow-countrymen for his treachery to an English lady, and for firing upon a vessel bearing the English flag.

"Not a bad place this, Chum, old fellow," said Hilton. "I could stay a month with comfort."

"Yes, so could I," said Chumbley, lazily; "but I want to get back."

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the reply. "I say, look at that Malay lady; she isn't unlike the Inche Maida, is she?"

"H'm, no: something like. I say, though, old fellow, I don't feel very easy about that affair. It hardly seems just that that woman should get off scot-free!"

"Nonsense: stuff, man. Let the poor body rest. Why, how ungallant you are! She fell in love with you, and wanted to marry you!"

"Very condescending of her, I'm sure," said Hilton. "But really, I think I shall tell Harley that she captured us. He believes Murad was at the bottom of it all."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind!" said Chumbley, firing up. "I shall take it as a personal affront if you do. You promised me you would not."

"Why, hallo! Is that you, Chum? You haven't taken a fancy to the woman, have you?"

"Never you mind, if—I say, draw your sword, man! Look out!" cried Chumbley, excitedly, as he drew his weapon from its sheath. "There's one of those mad Malay demons running a-muck!"

As he spoke there was a shouting and shrieking heard in the street between the Chinese bazaars; right in front people were running frantically, as if for their lives, while from the direction of the prison they could see a nearly nude Malay with a red handkerchief tied round his head, and a flaming yellow sarong about his waist, in strong contrast to the white and blue clothed crowd who were skurrying here and there.

Hilton's first instinct was to follow the example of the rest, and turn down some sideway or into a store; but as he saw first one and then another unfortunate stagger and fall where the fierce Malay dashed on, striking right and left, a feeling of rage took possession of him, and he felt ready to assist in the capture of the fanatic, who was racing out followed now by a mixed crowd of armed men, shouting with all their might, "*Amok! amok!*"

The Malay, with rolling eyes, foaming lips, and teeth gnashing like some wild beast, rushed toward the young officers. He was striking right and left with his kris, and two more men who had tried to intercept him fell from the deadly thrusts. Then a native woman was stabbed in the throat, and the savage enthusiast was making straight for where a couple of Indian nurses with some European children were cowering against a wall, too much alarmed to do anything but shriek.

This roused Hilton and Chumbley to action; and they interposed between the shrieking women and the Malay.

They were both good swordsmen as far as military teaching goes; but the Malay paid no more heed to their blunt regulation weapons than if they had been made of lath.

Hilton was first, and as he tried to guard himself from a thrust, the Malay leaped upon him and drove his kris through the fleshy part of his arm, and Chumbley stumbled over him.

With a shrill yell the Malay dashed on, struck at one of the women, who fell, and would have stabbed the children; but the fierce crowd was after him—a crowd gradually augmented, and among whom were three or four armed soldiers and a couple of the native police, each bearing what seemed to be a large pitchfork.

The Malay rushed on headlong, stabbing right and left, and marking his way with the bodies of the victims as he continued his fearful course, devoting himself to death, but with the furious thirst for blood displayed in such cases, where the *Amok* runner kills all he can, and goes on till he is either shot down or brought to bay.

Every now and then a Malay would make a stab at the savage as he passed, some of which blows took effect; but for the most part the runner escaped unhurt—the frightened people in the streets fleeing for life, with the consequence that here and there quite a little knot would be driven into a corner, crowding, shrieking together, unable to escape, and the outside unfortunates would receive lightning-like stabs before the wretch who delivered them raced on.

Chumbley rose to his feet and hastily tied a handkerchief round Hilton's bleeding arm, the latter turning faint, and having to be helped into a Chinaman's shop close at hand, the owner creeping from beneath his counter as the officers came in.

"Don't stop for me," said Hilton. "I'm all right."

Chumbley hesitated for a moment, and then ran out to see that the *Amok* runner had been turned and was coming back at full speed, apparently full of vigour as ever, though he was streaming with blood and striking savagely at any one who came in his way.

The young officer saw two more victims fall, and then the Malay dashed down a sideway, making for the harbour now, affording an opportunity for a couple of shots to be sent after him, neither of which, however seemed to take effect.

On came the shouting crowd of pursuers, thirsting for the Malay's blood, their object being to destroy him with as little compunction as they would a mad dog; but they did not gain upon him, and it was not until he had left several more inoffensive people weltering in their blood, that he turned at bay with his back to a blank wall, yelling, gnashing his teeth, and striking fiercely at his assailants with his dripping kris.

Suddenly, with a quick motion, one of the native policemen made a dart with the huge pitchfork he carried, his object being to strike the tines on either side of the madman and hold him pinned against the wall; but he was too quick, for he darted aside, and striking fiercely with his kris, started off afresh, but running more slowly now, for he was growing weak.

Still his thirst for blood was not assuaged, and running on he struck down a couple of Chinamen before he was again brought to bay in a kind of pool, where he stood glaring and displaying his teeth—a savage beast apparently, more than man—and ready to fight for his life to the very last.

For mad or no, the *Amok* runner knew that his fate was to be destroyed like some tiger. The native policemen's instructions were to take him prisoner, so as to bring such offender to trial; but the majority of these fanatics are hunted to their death.

And it was so here, for as the police advanced cautiously, one of them falling back directly with a slight stab in his breast, a cleverly-thrown spear passed right through the savage's neck, and he fell in the muddy pool.

It was a horrible sight to see the wild face rise again above the surface as its owner tried to struggle to his feet; but it was a vain effort. He was thrust under, pinned into the mud by half a dozen spears and bayonets, and a few bubbles rising to the surface, showed that the wretch's career was at an end.

Chumbley, big, strong man as he was, felt sick as he stood there leaning on his sword, while with shouts of triumph the mob of mingled nationality dragged the corpse from the muddy pool.

"You here, Chumbley?" said a familiar voice, and he turned to see Mr Harley.

"Yes: what a horrid affair!"

"Horrible! We don't often have them now. It is a native custom that is dying out. You know, I suppose, when a Malay has committed some crime that makes his pardon hopeless, or when some strong desire for revenge seizes him, he runs *Amok*—*a-muck*, as people call it—and then the innocent suffer till he is put out of the way."

"Then you think they are not mad?" said Chumbley, who could not withdraw his eyes from the ghastly corpse, round which the slayers stood in triumph.

"Mad with frenzy or enthusiasm," said Harley, "some of them think it an heroic death to die and—Good Heavens!—it is Murad!"

"No!" cried Chumbley.

It was. The Rajah had escaped from prison, had run *Amok* through the streets of Singapore, and the disfigured clay that lay there in the mud and blood, was all that remained of the abductor of Helen Perowne.

The two English spectators turned away with a shudder, and hurried to where poor Hilton lay back, rather faint from his wound, which was too slight, however, to be of a lasting nature.

Four poor creatures died from Murad's kris, and sixteen were wounded more or less severely before he was slain.

Volume Three—Chapter Thirty.

The Rajah at Home.

Five years had passed away before, after a long stay on the China station, Major Hilton found an opportunity, on the regiment being ordered home, to land at Singapore, and take his young wife with him up-country, to pay a long-promised visit to her old schoolfellow at the Residency at Sindang.

The doctor and Mrs Bolter had gone home the year before, in company with the chaplain, who longed for the peace of his own country once more; and letters said that the doctor was going to take a quiet country practice, where his brother-in-law, still a bachelor, had settled down.

For though Mrs Barlow, in addition to her wealth, had proffered that style of love-offering known to keepsake-writers as blandishments, the Reverend Arthur had a sore heart that never healed, and he refused to listen to the voice of the charmer, but contented himself with a true friendship for Helen, her husband, old Stuart, and Mr Perowne.

Otherwise there had been but little change at Sindang; the new Rajah being a quiet, gentlemanly man, growing more European in his ways year by year.

The Residency looked very bright and charming as the Major and his wife caught sight of the island from the deck of the steamer; and in spite of the heat, it was a delightful home, where Helen seemed to lead a life of calm repose, looking handsomer than ever with her large eyes, dark hair and delicate creamy complexion; but there was a change visible: she seemed softened and dreamy, and whenever her husband spoke, there was a bright, eager look of joy, that lit up her features and told well of her married life.

The meeting between Helen and Grey was almost pathetic in its warmth; and for a long time there was no chance for the gentlemen to speak.

Their meeting, too, was wonderfully warm; and while the Resident saw how broad-chested and sunbrowned the Major had become, Hilton had been noting how fair Helen's skin remained, in spite of her long stay in a tropic land; but when she smiled, there was still a faint trace left of disfigurement at the lower part of her teeth.

As for the Resident, he looked the *beau idéal* of a middle-aged English gentleman, and brighter and happier than Hilton had ever seen him before; while as to the old sore, it was quite healed up; and the meeting between Hilton and Helen was just that of old friends; nothing more.

"And now about Chumbley?" said Hilton, as they sat after dinner sipping their claret in the veranda, watching the fire-flies, and listening to the plashing of boat or reptile in the placid, rapid-flowing, starlit stream.

There had been inquiries before, but the time had been so taken up, that Chumbley's career had been pretty well left out till now; when, as the two gentlemen sat smoking, an open door showed them the drawing-room with its shaded lamp, and the faces of the two graceful women—their wives—as they sat and chatted of old school troubles, and the other incidents of their career.

"About old Chum?" said the Resident; "oh, I often see him. He should have been here if I had known you were so close at hand. You know he came back six months after the company was changed, went straight up to the Inche Maida's place, brought her back, and they went down to Singapore, got married, and returned directly."

"And has he repented?" said Hilton.

"Go and see him, and judge for yourself."

The result was, that one fine morning Hilton had himself rowed up to the Inche Maida's home, at Campong Selah, where, on landing, he found that he was received with the most profound respect, and conducted to the palm-tree house, which was now surrounded by a most carefully-cultivated garden.

On entering the place, he found himself in what might have been a country gentleman's home, the hall being full of sporting trophies, arms, and the paraphernalia of an occupant of sporting tastes.

"What. Hilton! never!" cried a bluff voice, and Chumbley, in a semi-sporting and native costume—wearing puggree, shooting jacket, sarong, and kris—and looking brown as a native, seized him by the hands, and nearly shook his arms out of their sockets. "Why, I am glad to see you, old man!"

"How well you look, Chumbley!"

"Ay! and you too! Why, you dog, you're putting on flesh! But, how's the little wife? How are you getting on?"

"Capitally! And you: do you like this savage life?"

"Savage, be hanged!" he cried. "Like it, my boy? I should think I do. By George, sir, she's a splendid woman! Ah, here are the chicks."

As he spoke, a Malay nurse brought in two little dark-eyed, creamy-complexioned children, who made a rush and a dash as soon as they were set free, and began to scale Chumbley's knees, not ceasing till they were standing in his lap, and holding on by his beard.

"Gently! gently! You'll break me! There never was such a pair of vital sparks on earth before! Now look here, you young limbs, turn round and talk to this gentleman. Tell him your names."

"Bertie Hilton Chumbley, Rajah of Campong Selah," said the elder—a handsome little boy in a brilliant silken sarong.

"Grey Stuart Chumbley, pa's own darling pet," lisped the other—a bright little doll of a girl, whom her father stood up afterwards and proudly balanced on one of his great hands.

"Like it," continued Chumbley, stretching himself; "I never knew what life was till I came out here and married the Inche Maida. Ah, here she is."

Hilton, as he recalled the past, felt a little conscious; but the Princess, who, in spite of her dark skin, looked quite the European lady, advanced, holding out her hand so frankly that they were laughing and chatting the next minute as if they were the oldest of friends, Hilton quite winning her heart by the way in which he took to her children.

"You remember what a mistake I made," she said, "and how disappointed I was when you refused me? I did not know then what fate had in store."

"You are still a fatalist then?" said Hilton, smiling.

"Why not?" she replied, proudly, as she went behind her great lord's chair, and placed her arm affectionately upon his shoulder. "Has not fate given me the best and noblest of husbands—a just and true man, who has become the father of my people, my protector, and my lord?"

"Then you are both very happy?" said Hilton.

"Happy, old boy!" cried Chumbley, glancing affectionately at his wife, "happy isn't the word for it; we're thoroughly jolly, and in my way I'm a king."

"But don't you miss European society?"

"Not I, lad. I hunt, and shoot, and drill my subjects, and sit as judge, and look after the revenues, and my own little parliament. I've no time to be dull; and do you know, old chap, I don't think I'm quite so slow as I was. I tell you what it is: if I had known how jolly it is to be a chief, I should have tried it on years before. But you're going to stop, of course?"

"I'm going to beg some dinner, and then I'm off back to the Residency, where my wife is staying with the Harleys."

"Then go back and fetch her—eh, my dear, what do you say?"

"Let us all go together and fetch her," said the Inche Maida, smiling; and Grey Hilton was fetched to spend a month at Chumbley's home, finding her old friend affectionate to a degree, while endless were the hunting and shooting

excursions got up by the English Rajah in honour of his friend.

The Hiltons have not paid another visit to the palm-tree palace on the river where Chumbley has his home, but they hear from him occasionally as well as from the Harleys, and the reports always tell of perfect happiness in their far-off land.

"I tell you what it is, Grey," says Hilton to his wife, the day after they had reached England, and she had held up her last little offering for him to kiss its tiny wet mouth, "I'll bet a five-pound note that old Chumbley would give something if his youngsters were as fair as that;" and Grey says that for her part she does not think the colour of the skin matters so long as the heart is in its right place, to which her father, who has just come in, says:

"That's a verra good remark, my dear. Do you know I'm glad to my heart I've managed to scrape five thousand together out of Perowne's estate, and the old man has settled it upon his children!"

"Five thousand! a nice little *bonne bouche* for Harley!" says Hilton.

"A man who thoroughly deserves it," says his wife; "for I'm sure a truer-hearted gentleman never existed. But I have had a letter from Helen, and she tells me that Mr Harley is coming to England for a year's leave. I am to answer to the hotel in Paris. What am I to say?"

"Say?" cried Hilton; "tell her and her husband that we are comfortably settled here, and as long as there is a roof and a bed, with something in the way of rations, there will always be a welcome for them both."

The End.

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